BORIS FILIPPOV

Actors Without Make-Up

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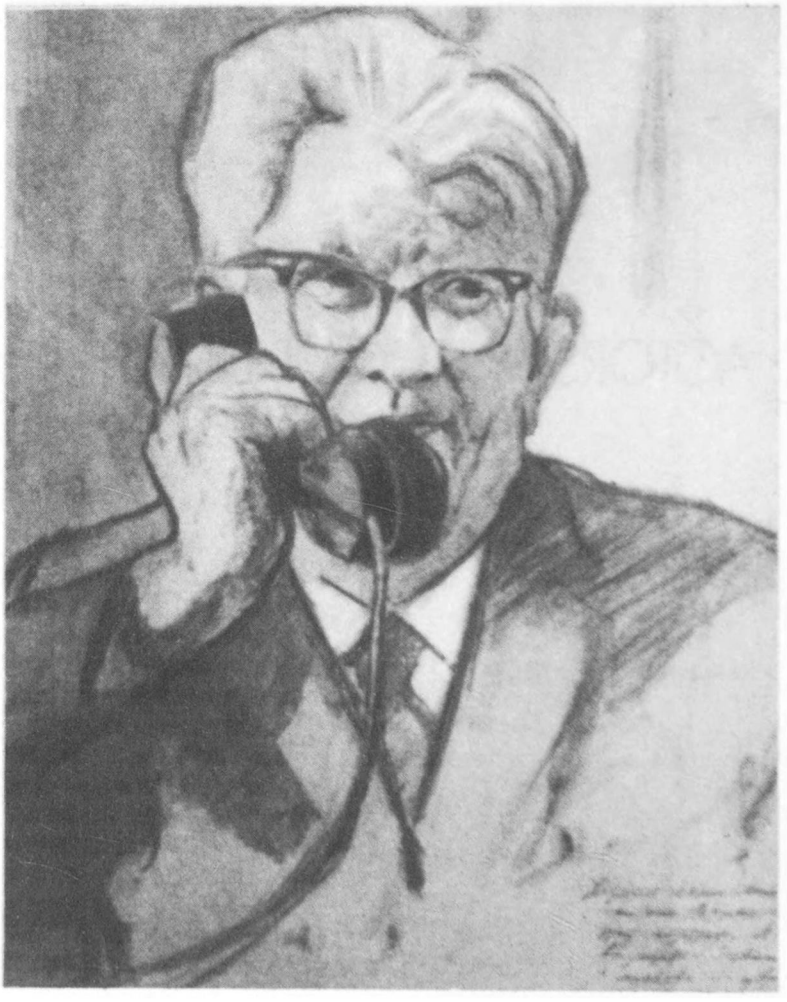

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ACTORS WITHOUT MAKE-UP

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FOREWORD

The author of this book, Boris Filippov, is a person about whose profession his numerous friends in the theatrical and literary world joke affectionately referring to him as their "house-spirit". Filippov was one of the initiators and organisers of the first club for the artistic intelligentsia in post-revolutionary Moscow, a club which subsequently grew into the Central Art Workers' Club. He was in charge of it for many years and is today the director of the Central Writers' Club. A very likeable "house-spirit".

For over forty years now Boris Filippov has been constantly connected with our most eminent actors, directors, painters, writers and sculptors. He is an intelligent and tactful person, highly attentive to those around him, and it is difficult to imagine that anyone else in his position could have so many friends and well-wishers in the world of the arts.

In this book Filippov sums up, as it were, his long association with this colourful and fascinating world. These are not memoirs in which the author leads the reader along the paths of his life. Or an essay in which he expounds his views. It is rather a collection of genial observations, in which a pleasant and perceptive person has sought to record and preserve for posterity not only the great discoveries and deeds, but the vital, human features and minutiae of the interesting people with whom it was his good fortune to be acquainted.

He observes them, commits to memory and then puts down on paper their conversations, their jokes, their thoughts and opinions,

expressed among close friends, and he includes in this book only that which is significant and is not generally known, that which will help readers add a living touch to their picture of these people.

The personalities that come to life in this book include such famous names as Anatoly Lunacharsky, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Ivan Moskvin, Konstantin Stanislavsky, Maxim Gorky, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Vassily Kachalov. They come to life not on stage or screen, or in the concert hall. They appear without make-up, in a close circle of friends, observed by the keen eye of the author.

Boris Polevoi

I would love to relive my boyhood;
In new buildings blithely to slide
Down the banisters of remembrance
Like a teenager starry-eyed!

Mikhail SVETLOV

MEETINGS

THE PIMENOVSKY CELLAR

The face of Moscow has changed beyond all recognition over the last few decades. My generation has witnessed the transformation of the capital's centre. The "Kitaiskaya stena" (China Wall) and the squat buildings of Okhotny Ryad (Hunters' Row) are remembered only by people who have reached a ripe old age. Skyscrapers have sprung up and motorways appeared — subways, tunnels and overpasses. The trolleybus and the car have taken the place of the tram and completely ousted the cabby and the horse-drawn carriage. The Metro, which links the town centre with large new residential areas, has become an integral part of everyday life and the pride of Muscovites.

Buildings and monuments have moved. I saw Minin and Pozharsky, Ivan Fyodorov, and Pushkin "move to new quarters", and Gogol smiling through his tears has given up his place on the boulevard to his cheerful double.

The streets and squares have changed not only their appearance, but also their names. They have been named after scholars, writers, actors, painters and public figures. Many of my contemporaries walked round these streets never dreaming that one day their names would be part of the geography of the capital.

Yet today the central streets and squares remind us of Gorky, Mayakovsky, Lunacharsky, Alexei Tolstoy, Stanislavsky, Nemirovich-Danchenko, Kachalov, Moskvin, the Sadovskys, Ostuzhev, Sobinov, Nezhdanova, Vakhtangov, Shchukin, Khmelyov and others.

Each time I walk along the streets of old Moscow and come upon these dear names I think how fortunate we were in being able to mix with the great figures who created our literature, our arts. It is a pity that when we were actually in the company of such people many of us did not attach sufficient importance to it and relied misguidedly on our memories. Yet perhaps tiny grains of memory, pieced together, will be able one day to help recreate in full the life-stories of those of our contemporaries who left a deep imprint on the development of socialist culture.

In a busy part of the capital, near Mayakovsky Square, is a street which bears the name of Medvedev, the famous partisan and intelligence officer. For several centuries up to the early 1950s the Church of St. Pimen stood here, and the street used to be called Staropimenovsky Alley. The fine artist Ivan Pavlov depicted in his engravings this Alley, one of the most picturesque spots in old Moscow.

In the 1920s the Friends of Art and Culture Circle had its premises in a house by the church.

There was no sign over the entrance. The Circle's address was known to the whole of the Moscow theatre world. An extremely rickety-looking staircase led down into the cellar. But no sooner had you descended into this refuge of the muses than the impression of squalor disappeared immediately. The Circle's premises were like a sumptuous apartment with lounges and a small banqueting hall.

There were also a restaurant with separate cubicles along the walls, a billiard room and a card room. The furniture was made of mahogany in Empire style. There were secretaires with bronze fittings and incrustations, high-backed chairs, and a marble bust of Voltaire as a symbol of "free thinking". Over all this reigned a portrait of the Circle's honorary director, the eminent Russian actor and playwright Sumbatov-Yuzhin, excellently executed by Yuon.

This club with its card-tables was a characteristic product of NEP.* At midnight a stream of horse-drawn cabs turned into

* NEP (New Economic Policy) was the economic policy introduced by the Soviet Government in 1921. Its aim was to effect the transition from capitalism to socialism. Its main principles were elaborated by V. I. Lenin and adopted by the 10th Congress of the RCP(B) in March 1921.

During the NEP period a certain temporary revival of capitalist elements (mostly in commerce) was permitted.

Staropimenovsky Alley in the 1930s. From an engraving by I. Pavlov

Staropimenovsky Alley and a crowd of actors, writers and poets, with a fair sprinkling of somewhat smart characters gathered in the Circle. The "friends of art and culture" indulged in preference, vint and other card games till dawn. Pip and chemin-de-fer, both played for money, flourished "under the counter". Fines for card gambling were the main item of revenue in the Circle's budget.

Sesame opened the doors to guests who were either recommended by the "elite" or were friends of the administrators of the establishment. Neither the former nor the latter were particularly discriminating in their recommendations. But the theatrical world had become attached to this cellar and at the end of the 1920s it would have been unreasonable to simply close it down.

At that time the Art Workers' Trade Union was headed by Yakov Boyarsky and Victor Gorodinsky, intelligent, sensitive and educated men, to whom art was everything. They possessed yet another quality of great value in the theatrical world — an inexhaustible sense of humour.

The desire to extend contacts with the creative intelligentsia in an informal atmosphere, outside official establishments, led Boyarsky and Gorodinsky to the idea of setting up an arts club in Moscow in

Anatoly Lunacharsky

place of the old Friends of Art and Culture Circle. Before taking any action, they decided to seek the advice of Anatoly Lunacharsky who was then People's Commissar for Education.

Slightly rolling his r's in the French manner and looking keenly at Boyarsky and Gorodinsky through his pince-nez Lunacharsky said firmly:

"The easiest thing would be to close it down. It's much harder to *beat* it. I went to that cellar once. It's a nice, cosy place. Actors must be given a chance to get together, like painters and writers do. You are probably against the content, rather than the form, aren't you? Try using the *present* form and giving it a new content. Gambling game is not essential, of course. Better do without it. But all this must be handled intelligently, delicately. And it must be done by people in the arts world themselves. Put your faith in them and everything will be all right. Set up a proper Soviet actors' club, but one that is interesting and really creative. Everyone needs a club like that. I'll visit it myself, believe me."

Lunacharsky made a telephone call to the Moscow City Soviet and quickly arranged that the Circle's premises should be handed over to the Art Workers' Trade Union. It was formally resolved to open a club for Moscow theatre workers in the cellar.

But the distance between a formal decision and its execution is not always a short one. The Circle's leaders decided not to give in without a struggle. It was not until the beginning of February 1930 that I, armed with formidable mandate, "took possession" of the Pimenovsky cellar in my capacity as director and hoisted the flag of the Theatre Workers' Club there.

FIRST STEPS

I had taken part in and attended numerous meetings, but never had I witnessed a more disorganised one. For the first time the "pillars of the theatre" assembled in the Circle's premises to discuss what form the new club should take. Everyone talked at once, the chairman was totally ignored, and passions blazed like bonfires.

The dispute was constantly renewed in subsequent years in similar clubs for the creative intelligentsia and has not been finally settled to this very day.

Many years later at a most important meeting Nikolai Okhlopkov, with his characteristic oratorial verve, complained that the Central Art Workers' Club and the Actors' Club did not bring Moscow producers together for a cup of tea within their four walls: "How nice it would be to meet, chat and exchange professional views with one's colleagues!"

Shamed by Okhlopkov's just accusations, I wrote to him the next day requesting him to attend such a meeting and suggest a convenient date for it.

My missive did not bring forth a reply, but a few days later Okhlopkov dropped in to the Central Art Workers' Club on some business, and I continued the conversation which he had started.

"Oh, my dear fellow," Okhlopkov replied in quite a different tone from the one which he had adopted at the meeting. "What do you take me for, a babe-in-arms? What do I need all that for?" He laughed and continued jokingly: "I come and tell Zavadsky what my

theatre is planning to put on, then he goes off and wins my playwrights over? No, thank you!"

Joking apart, however, the argument continued in the early 1930s and is still going on today. Some supported the idea of a club of the strictly closed type with a limited membership, a club for the "select few". Others insisted that the club should be a place where prominent actors and beginners could meet. The point of view of Ivan Moskvin, which is still valid to this very day, eventually triumphed.

Moskvin was a man of rare charm and simplicity. But he could be angry and adamant in the defence of his basic principles. He was ardently opposed to the setting up of a "circle" of the closed type.

"The age of 'aristocratism' has passed. It's time we realised that the strength of our club does not lie only in contact with one another. Naturally, I am delighted to see you all and listen to you. But give me the chance in our club to see and listen to scientists, writers, front-rank factory workers, and representatives of related spheres of the arts—artists, composers, musicians."

He was backed up by "Solomon the Wise"—Mikhoels, whose opinion also carried a great deal of weight with art workers.

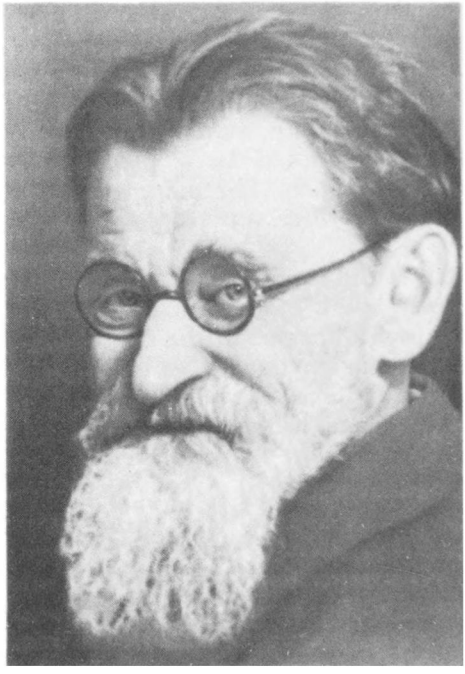
The idea arose of electing Felix Kon president of the Club's Board; he was then in charge of the Main Arts Department of the Commissariat for Education. I rang him at once and obtained his consent. Soon the whole "cabinet" was formed. Ivan Moskvin and Valeria Barsova were elected vice-presidents.

The new actors' club was headed by a splendid triumvirate: a professional revolutionary and born agitator, who had been through the hard school of underground fighting against the tsarist regime; an original and talented actor with a keen mind and understanding of the actor's "soul" and, finally, the "Russian nightingale", that glorious singer who enchanted everyone with her magical voice, artistry and personal charm. With a leadership like this the club could count confidently on the attention of the artistic intelligentsia.

True, certain persons in the arts expressed their doubts on the election of such a venerable president:

"They've elected Kon, but they'll get an ikon! Is he really capable of doing the job? Hasn't he got his hands full with the Main Arts Department? Dealing with actors is just as hard as doing another term of tsarist hard labour!"

The prophesies of the sceptics and wits were without substance, however. Felix Kon descended on the club without waiting for the next Board meeting.



Felix Kon

I had heard a great deal about him, but this was the first time I had seen him. His appearance reminded one of Kalinin. He had the same beard and moustache. At workers' meetings and gatherings he was frequently mistaken for the "Union boss". Yet this was just a first impression. In fact there was something quite distinctive and unforgettable about his appearance. The beetling grey brows, the young, shining eyes, the aquiline nose, the peculiarly modulated voice which occasionally went falsetto, and the slight Polish accent.

Kon was then in his sixties, but looked much older than his years. The years of imprisonment and emigration had added many a wrinkle to his face.

The actors liked Kon for his kindness, his sense of humour, amazing simplicity, colourful speeches and ardent conviction. They shared his passionate love of the arts.

He often regaled the actors with lively accounts of his revolutionary past and his numerous escapes from prison and tsarist hard labour.

Felix Kon was born in Warsaw on May 30, 1864. His family was closely connected with the people who fought to free Poland from tsarist rule. He began to take an active part in the revolutionary movement as a young man, joining, in the early 1880s, the ranks of the Polish proletariat party which was formed under the influence of the People's Will. In his revolutionary underground work Kon used the pseudonyms of Fis, Stozhek, Stozhinsky and Stogov. He had to traverse a hard and complex path before he became a Marxist and joined the ranks of the Bolsheviks. Kon devoted all his life to the great cause of the struggle against the dark forces of reaction, remaining an ardent tribune of the people to the end of his life. He died at the beginning of the Great Patriotic War. A few days before his death he gave a speech to Red Army soldiers, passionately urging them to defeat nazism. He died in July 1941 on a Volga steamboat, while being evacuated from Moscow on Party orders. He himself had not wanted to leave the capital in those grim war days.

Such was the fine revolutionary, the dreamer who loved poetry and the arts with all his being and had managed to find his way into the hearts of the artistic intelligentsia. His appointment as head of the Main Arts Department was no accident and fully accorded with his own interests.

People in the arts also loved and respected him for the fact that he never laid down the law, never ruled by edict alone. He knew how to persuade intelligently, subtly and tactfully. At the same time he never let the theatres down, and always defended them in their difficult moments, their times of failure.

His many public duties included that of running the Political Hard Labourers' Society.* One of the veteran fighters in the revolution, he dreamed of setting up in Moscow a theatre of the history of the revolutionary movement.

Felix Kon was a charming person and an excellent narrator. He was also a great one for joking.

No one gave Kon more pleasure than the young Sergei Obraztsov with his parody entitled "Felix Kon — reporter" at one of the club's *kapoustniks.***

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* The Society for former political hard labourers was organised in 1921 on the initiative of Dzerzhinsky. Its members were eminent participants in the revolutionary movement. The Society provided members with material assistance and engaged in the conservation, study and publication of historical material.— *Ed.*

** *Kapoustnik*— an amateur entertainment with acts of a comic, satirical nature. This was originally the name given to informal gatherings of actors which were accompanied by refreshments in the form of cabbage (*kapousta*) meals.— *Ed.*

First club conference. Seated: A. Kramov, Y. Shatrova, V. Khenkin, V. Barsova, F. Kon, Y. Vaneyeva, I. Moskvin, V. Mlechin. Standing: Robert Adelgeim, I. Akimov, K. Bayanov, A. Azarin

Felix Kon possessed a sense of humour himself and valued this quality in others. His distinctive appearance was an extremely convenient subject for caricaturists.

I will not conceal the fact that I was somewhat intimidated by the first appearance of the new president. Fortunately for me there were several actors who had dropped in for supper at the club although it was not yet officially open. Radin, Mikhoels, Borisov, Klimov and Rudin were there. In addition, I managed to phone Moskvin and ask him to come over at once to meet the president. Many interesting things were said that evening. We all became immediately aware of Kon's deep interest in our club which he saw as a chance not only to debate this or that aspect of theatrical life, but also to get to know more about the thoughts and aspirations of actors.

Felix Kon fully approved of the club's aim to become a "mirror of life", to reflect all topical questions. He quoted a couple of lines from the great Goethe to us:

Wer den Dichter will verstehen,
Muss in Dichter's Lande gehen.

"And anyone who wants to understand the working class which is building socialism," Kon continued, "anyone who wants to depict its life on the stage, must become one with it, live its life, delve into its aspirations, stop being an impartial, passive bystander and take an active part in the construction!"

I have quoted Kon's words verbatim. And I assure you that he was not merely repeating catch-phrases from leading articles. He had the gift of speaking with such inner conviction that even familiar expressions seemed to acquire a special ring and meaning.

These words were spoken at a time when the Land of the Soviets had embarked upon the First Five-Year Plan: to turn itself from an agrarian country into a mighty industrial power. An enormous effort was being put into fulfilling production plans. Sweeping reforms were taking place in the countryside. Small, individual peasant farms joined together into collective farms. The kulaks were being liquidated as a class.

A talk with Felix Kon determined the trend of our club's activity.

February 1930 was, as usual, the time when preparations were being made in the countryside for sowing the spring crops. Scores of lecture-and-entertainment teams set off for the rural areas. There were club meetings at which the actors heard talks about the class struggle in the countryside, the collective farm movement and the importance of mechanising agriculture. The teams set off for the countryside as if it were the front. And not all of them returned from this front. A group of actors from the Lensoviet Theatre in Moscow, led by Comrade Andreichuk, a member of the Moskvoretsky district Party committee, were killed by kulaks.

The team was to give concerts, render assistance to local reading rooms, disseminate political and agricultural literature, and help in the fields.

In June 1930, on the eve of St. Peter's Day, the actors arrived in the village of Vechkusy in the Mordovian Autonomous Region. The local kulaks spread the rumour that the team had come to confiscate the villagers' grain and livestock. This lie had fatal consequences. The team leader, Comrade Andreichuk, was killed, together with the actress Anna Shurkina and properties manager Sergei Filippov.

The others escaped death by pure chance. They were berry-picking in the forest when the bandits attacked, and a local Komsomol girl warned them of the danger. It was from her that they learned of their comrades' tragic death....

In September 1930 the press published an appeal from the Party Central Committee and the Presidium of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions to eliminate shortcomings in industry and transport. At this crucial point the club was again at the forefront of the battle.

At Moskvin's suggestion ten lecture-and-entertainment teams were set up for factories which were behind with their plans.

The club's appeal to its members rang out like a battle cry.

"Comrade! You have been mobilised!

"In these historic times theatre workers cannot stand aloof from socialist construction. The finest workers in the arts must be used to organise public aid in the development of the socialist emulation and shock-work movements, to help factories advance counter-industrial-and-financial plans."

The first response to the appeal came from the well-known actors Blyumental-Tamarina, Kachalov and Yuryev, who was at that time playing in the Maly Theatre in Moscow. A headquarters was set up at the club to form brigades which included both young people and some celebrated actors who gave concerts at factories.

It was in these exciting days that I became more closely acquainted with Vsevolod Meyerhold.

At a city meeting on the subject of "The Arts in the Struggle for the Industrial and Financial Plan" the club board decided to hold a meeting to review the work of the teams. They agreed on the premises of the Meyerhold theatre.

"Well, in that case let Meyerhold command the whole parade!" suggested Moskvin.

Meyerhold had a complex character and was to a considerable extent a person of mood. Criticism in the press and in debates had made him so short-tempered that it was sometimes difficult to get him to agree on the most uncontroversial questions. This was only logical. The more the pressure, the greater the resistance, and sometimes a quite excessive degree of suspiciousness. Knowing Meyerhold's character, no one on the club board felt capable of entering into "diplomatic negotiations" with him. The choice fell on me as someone who was neutral and whom he did not know.

"There's no point in my ringing him up," said Moskvin. "He doesn't think much of the Art Theatre. And it's hopeless for Klimov

First lecture-and-entertainment team of Moscow actors. Front row: A. Kostomolotsky, N. Osipov, V. Kachalov. Second row: M. Gelman, I. Klyucharyov, I. Akimov

to try. He knows each of us inside-out. But the club director is an official person. You'll get no change out of him. And Meyerhold won't kill him either. At the most he'll refuse."

After all these warnings I still did not dare go straight to the maître, but rang him first on the phone.

The conversation did not get off to a very promising start. My preamble was pathetically stereotype and produced an ironic reaction from Meyerhold.

"Good morning, Vsevolod Emilyevich. This is the Theatre Workers' Club. I am the director."

"Is there such a club? Still, I suppose if there's a director, there must be a club too.... What can I do for you?"

"We are very sorry that you come here so rarely."

"You're mistaken, my dear man. I don't come *at all*."

"Er, no. But you could drop in after the show. It wouldn't be too late. We stay open until 3 o'clock in the morning. That's what I rang up to tell you."

"Only that? It's not much. I don't go to night clubs. It's bad for the health. And I don't recommend others to, either. Night's the time for sleeping, my dear comrade."

The club's honour was obviously at stake.

In spite of my inner trepidation, I felt humiliated and assumed the offensive. Nervousness gave my voice a distinctly squeaky note.

"Excuse me, Vsevolod Emilyevich, but what right have you to talk like that about our club? You're probably confusing it with the old Circle, aren't you? We don't deserve such a reputation. Come and see for yourself. Or at least ask your actors."

To Meyerhold's credit he did not slam down the receiver or put an end to the conversation. I heard a slight cough in the ear piece. There was a short pause.

"Hm, you do take offence easily. Never mind—that's not such a bad thing. Everyone should stick up for his principles... but not lose his sense of humour! Sorry if I said anything to give offence. I'll drop in when I have a minute."

So that was that. But then I remembered that I had not carried out my main task and hurriedly conveyed to Meyerhold the club's request concerning the meeting.

To my profound amazement he immediately gave his unqualified consent to take responsibility for the artistic organisation of the meeting. Then, after a pause, added:

"Well, it's a worthy cause. I shall consider it an honour. But we

Vsevolod Meyerhold

must know more about the participants. Who is going to take part, what theatres? You say Boyarsky and Kon will come? That's good. Get the programme approved, then come and see me. It's impossible to work out the scenario for a meeting if you don't know the participants and the repertoire of the teams. After all, our main task is to put the message across, if it's worth it."

When I appeared a few days later with the programme for the meeting, Meyerhold gave me an arch look.

"So you're the one who 'argued' with me the other day on the telephone, are you? If I'd known you were so young I'd have behaved differently. I might not have jumped down your throat like that."

We arranged on the preparations for the meeting and a rehearsal for the teams which were taking part.

As decor for the meeting Meyerhold decided to use the sets for *The Shot*, a play by Alexander Bezymensky. The auditorium was criss-crossed with floodlights and onto the stage out of the audience marched groups of gymnasts, followed by the teams of the theatres

and the Blue Blouse* which was popular at that time. On the theatre balcony was the Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by the eminent composer and conductor Ippolitov-Ivanov.

The meeting was skilfully "directed" by Meyerhold in a new and unexpected way for the audience. The emotional impact of this Meyerhold's work which has never been mentioned, was great. Each theatre contributed to the success of the whole.

In the course of the meeting the Moscow Art Theatre performed a vocal oratorio. It began with an address to factory shock-workers, calling upon them to join forces in carrying out the five-year plan.

The theatre in which this memorable meeting was taking place had also prepared its theatrical report. The text was written by Bezymensky. Meyerhold dedicated his speech to the need for the theatre to meet the requirements of the working people more fully. He delivered his speech from a bridge suspended from the flies and he looked like a captain standing at the ship's helm. The slight swaying of the bridge enhanced this impression.

As always the speaker was paradoxical and caustic, never missing an opportunity to vent his anger on academic theatres.

"We've had enough 'Sleeping Beauties'," he said challengingly, "enough of these 'beauties for the sleeping'! Long live Soviet plays, Soviet opera, Soviet ballet!"

At that time reactionary forces were consolidating in many European countries. The Vatican became extremely active. The Pope declared a "Crusade" against the Land of the Soviets, and churchmen everywhere responded to the call.

On the initiative of Felix Kon the club began to play an active role in atheistic propaganda. Well-known scientists and politicians gave talks to the Moscow artistic intelligentsia. A series of talks and reports on scientific-atheistic subjects was opened by Kon, and we soon enlisted speakers such as N. Semashko, Y. Yaroslavsky and A. Lunacharsky, who frequently visited the club.

On one such visit we had to waive the rule that no one resting in the club was to be troubled with business requests. We asked Lunacharsky to help us by taking part in, and giving advice on, our planned series of anti-religious lectures.

"Why are you asking me?" he joked. "That old specialist on

* The Blue Blouse was a type of variety entertainment. Blue Blouse groups gave performances at clubs, factories, recreation centres. Their programmes reflected political life and also included local topics (industrial and everyday subjects).— *Ed.*

anti-religious affairs Demyan* is a much more frequent visitor to your club than I am. Or, you'd better approach Yaroslavsky!"

Lunacharsky not only examined the lecture programme carefully, however, but also agreed to read a paper on "Religion and Philosophy". Subsequently he frequently gave talks in the club on subjects ranging from philosophical problems to the development of music hall. His lectures and papers always attracted many people from the arts world. The audience was amazed at his erudition.

He quoted by heart the classics of Marxism and famous Russian and other European writers and was a brilliant polemicist. His wife Rozenel-Lunacharskava, who was an actress at the Maly Theatre, told me that one day Lunacharsky had quoted Lenin at a debate or meeting and an effusive lady in the audience had retorted shrilly:

"Lenin never said that!"

"He may not have said it to *you*, Madam, but he did to *me*," Lunacharsky countered calmly.

Due to his clarity of thought and strict logic of exposition Lunacharsky's speeches always went home to the audiences. After passionate debates on art he would sit around in the club with his friends, people from the arts world. He was an inexhaustible, fascinating and extremely witty conversationalist.

In spite of the numerous demands on his time Lunacharsky often dropped into the club simply to have a rest, play a few rounds of billiards or watch a club members' *kapoustnik*.

The informal atmosphere of club entertainments produced many stage parodies of famous people in the arts world. Nor did Lunacharsky fail to attract attention. A young actor by the name of A. Ivanov did a brilliant parody of him. He was made up to look like Lunacharsky and achieved a remarkable likeness not only in appearance but also in tone of voice and the way he spoke.

Lunacharsky would laugh heartily, watching his double expatiate on some abstruse subject.

The act usually began with the Lunacharsky's impersonator pretending not to know where he was, who the audience was, and what he was supposed to be lecturing on. Having decided that he was addressing doctors, the speaker began to talk about medicine. The audience "corrected" him. Unruffled, he went on to talk about education. He was again corrected by remarks from the audience. Composed as ever he switched to music ... and so on until he was told

---

* Demyan Bedny, the poet. Many of his poems were of an anti-religious nature.—*Ed.*

that his audience consisted of actors. He then changed the subject again rapidly and began to lecture on the theatre.

One day Ivanov helped us to play a trick on the Leningrad actors who were meeting at the beginning of the season in their house of arts. A delegation from our club led by Felix Kon had been invited to the evening. Kon came on to the stage with a serious air and announced:

"Dear Comrades. Allow me to give the floor to Anatoly Vasilvevich Lunacharsky who has accompanied us and will now give an address."

The audience greeted this announcement with tumultuous applause. When the pseudo-Lunacharsky appeared and began to speak the applause grew into an ovation. It was only when he started talking complete gibberish that the audience realised they had been taken for a ride by their Moscow guests.

MAYAKOVSKY AMONG THE ACTORS

The first slogan to be put up brand-new in the club was an appeal uttered by Mayakovsky's stentorian voice:

Marxism's a weapon,
A fire-arm, to wit;
It calls for know-how
In handling it.

In the last few months of his life Mayakovsky was a frequent visitor to the club. Sometimes he came alone, sometimes with the poet Iosif Utkin, his constant billiard partner, and occasionally with a small party, consisting mostly of actors.

The official opening of the club took place on February 25, 1930. By 11 o'clock in the evening the alley was packed with hired sledges. The whole of the Moscow theatre world was there.

The tables were set in the auditorium. On the small club stage the young people had prepared a satirical review in which Sergei Obraztsov, Rina Zelyonaya, Boris Tenin and Lev Mirov took part.

That venerable Moscow master-of-ceremonies A. Mendelevich and his colleague A. Alexeyev were skilfully persuading people at the tables to come onto the stage and perform. Suddenly a loud voice began to ask Mayakovsky to go up. The hall broke into an uproar:

"Mayakovsky! Mayakovsky! Recite something! Go onto the stage!"

It was already about two o'clock in the morning. The poet was sitting at a table in the corner with the actor M. Yanshin and the actress V. Polonskaya. He clearly did not want to perform. But the exhortations grew stronger and his resistance gave way. He got to his

feet and walked slowly and heavily to the stage, shaking hands with acquaintances and friends on the way.

On the tiny stage of the low-ceilinged club house he looked particularly huge and impressive. Complete silence descended immediately on the hall.

"I shall read the introduction to my new poem. It is entitled *Aloud and Straight.* You are hearing it for the first time."

A new salvo of applause. The audience waited with bated breath. Mayakovsky drew a tattered notebook from his pocket and the forceful verse of the "agitator and brazen-mouthed ringleader" hammered down upon us. It is difficult to convey the audience's reaction when he finished. For a few seconds there was a deathly silence, which was suddenly broken by a wild, spontaneous ovation. Everyone jumped up to applaud the poet.

"And now we shall ask Vasily Ivanovich Kachalov to take the floor!" somebody cried out.

Kachalov went up onto the stage and said firmly:

"It's impossible to perform after Mayakovsky."

The concert was over....

Subsequently Mayakovsky came to our club on many occasions. He could often be seen in the small lounge chatting animatedly in a circle of "Meyerholders" or arguing about the fine arts with the artists Moor and Cheremnykh. But more frequently he dropped in just to have a rest and relax over the billiard table. He used to say there was a fine old rule that "if you work standing up, you should rest sitting down, and if you work sitting down, you should rest standing up".

Perhaps this explains why he was particularly fond of billiards which he regarded as a sport, ironically referring to anyone who doubted this as a "preference player".

Mayakovsky played in high spirits and "peppered" his shots with witticisms even when he was losing. It was from him that we obtained the amusing epigram which we later hung up in the club for the "edification" of visitors:

Remember one thing all your life:
When going club-ward, take your wife;
Don't imitate the wealthy:
Your own, not someone else's!

"Did you write that?" we asked Mayakovsky.

"What a question.... It's an old Russian folk rhyme!" replied the poet jokingly.

Vladimir Mayakovsky

It later emerged that the first two lines had been written by Sergei Tretyakov and the last two by Mayakovsky.

During his billiard "battles" with Iosif Utkin Mayakovsky sometimes suggested that they should play "for lines". This meant the loser had to give the winner his next batch of royalties for a newly published poem. How the two managed to work out these complex calculations afterwards is a complete mystery.

Late one evening I witnessed a billiard combat between Mayakovsky and Lunacharsky, who was also keen on the game but became nervous when he was losing. Mayakovsky coolly shot the balls into the pockets, repeating all the time that it is embarrassing for a People's Commissar to beat an ordinary mortal.

"Even if he won the game by honest means, a People's Commissar would be accused of encouraging boot-licking!"

One day Mayakovsky met a conceited critic at the club who had given *The Bed-Bug* a bad review. He decided to "get even" at the billiard table and with studied politeness invited the critic to have a game.

The critic talked down to everyone, even in the billiard room. He had the reputation of being a good player, but Mayakovsky gave him the "odds" on condition that the loser should creep under the billiard table three times. At first his opponent would not agree, but his obvious advantage and the temptation of seeing Mayakovsky in such a ridiculous position weakened his customary circumspection.

I think this was the first time I had seen Mayakovsky play in a tense, serious mood.

News of the game sped round the club in a flash, and a crowd of "fans" assembled in the billiard room. Everyone supported Mayakovsky with encouraging remarks. The self-conceited critic was soon forced to creep under the table accompanied by the delighted howls of all present.

"A born creep can't be a writer!" said Mayakovsky. "Perhaps you would like to get your own back?" he asked his opponent, but the critic had lost all interest in the game.

For a long time the club kept Mayakovsky's billiard cue until it was handed over to the State Library Museum named after the poet.

Mayakovsky's last visit to our club was shortly before his death. There was nothing to betoken his tragic end. He entered the billiard room, asking jokingly:

"Who's to be my next victim?"

On this occasion the victim was Alexander Mendelevich, the compère, who used to say that Moscow had three old monuments: the St. Basil's Cathedral, the Tsar Bell, and himself, Mendelevich.

There were few visitors to the club that evening and the poet did not stay long. I met him in the narrow corridor and persuaded him into my tiny office.

"You come here often, Vladimir Vladimirovich. Evidently you don't think too badly of us," I said. "We would be very glad if you joined the club."

Mayakovsky smiled and said jokingly:

"Why not! If it gives me the right to play billiards without queueing up.... I'll think about it. Only you had something else in mind. You want to make me do something. But I'm a weak, sickly person."

Seeing my confused expression, Mayakovsky suddenly altered his tone and said kindly:

"Alright, alright. Don't be upset. I'll definitely join your club. I like the cellar. The ceilings are low, and I look taller here. That's very important, my dear friend, to look taller. What's this you're giving me?" He suddenly frowned, glaring at the small form which I had handed him. "A form? Another form? No, my dear director, in that case I'll wait. As soon as you do away with all your forms, you can regard me as an active member!"

The poet strode off to the exit. I saw him stop for a while in the foyer by the bust of Pushkin, stroke it lightly, then go to the cloakroom.

This was my last meeting with Mayakovsky. Shortly afterwards we heard the terrible news....

A SEARCH FOR NEW WAYS

"What would art be if it could be achieved without hard work," Mikhailo Shchepkin, the founder of the realist school in the Russian theatre, once said.

"The greater the talent, the more cultivation and technique it requires," Stanislavsky was wont to say.

The statements by brilliant exponents of Russian scenic art have become a by-word for everyone connected with the Soviet theatre.

By no means all theatre-goers realise fully how complex and difficult is the creative path which leads to success on the stage. Many still have the old, conservative notion of actors as people who live "free as birds" and know nothing of worry or hard work. Yet true art requires, in addition to talent and inspiration, a great deal of hard work which involves a tremendous expenditure of inner energy by the actor or artist and often places an intolerable strain on the whole nervous system. Unfortunately this question has not yet become the object of serious study by the relevant scientific research institutes.

Each profession has its own complexities which must be overcome in order to reach the peak of mastery. The dramatic actor works on a role not only at rehearsals, but also outside the theatre. The opera singer, in addition to rehearsals and learning parts with the accompanist, constantly performs exercises at home. Ballet dancers and circus artistes spend a great deal of time each day on the difficult and exacting training without which perfection in their profession is inconceivable. So the daytime is taken up with rehearsals and the evening with the performance itself. The only time which actors

Club evening devoted to M. Shchepkin. Left to right: Y. Shchepkina, T. Shchepkina-Kupernik and V. Ryzhova

usually have for rest and self-instruction is either their free days or the few evenings when they are not performing. Sometimes it is the short break between the end of a rehearsal and the beginning of the performance. Or else at night after they eventually leave the theatre.

So it was these few hours of leisure which our club had to "catch". Its success in the acting world was due largely to the fact that we took into account the conditions under which actors worked. Another factor also contributed to the club's popularity: an understanding of the psychological peculiarities of the theatre world. We were dealing with people who were often more susceptible to the emotional approach than the rationalist one. The acting world did not respond to the stereotype devices of club propaganda—straightforward appeals and quotations blazoned on red streamers. Snappy rhymes were far more effective. Poetry became our constant ally and poets willingly assisted the club.

We also made use of poetry in the pre-war years, during the Great Patriotic War and in peace-time. It gave us heroics, lyricism and satire. If one were to gather together all the poetic works connected with the life of the club they would make a most voluminous collection with many a famous name.

At the beginning of the 1930s Ilya Selvinsky suggested the following poetic slogan for the first competition of reciters.

The poet's word is not just lace,
No shiny gem for decoration.
The poet's word's a gun whose place
Is here—on guard of the Revolution.

For the club's fifth birthday we prepared a printed newspaper to which poets also contributed. It contained Vera Inber's poem "Confession":

Because I'm busy, sad to say,
I cannot come here every night,
But when I do, it always gives
Me inexpressible delight.

One of the most venerable representatives of Soviet poetry, the well-known translator Tatiana Shchepkina-Kupernik, also sent a telegram of greetings in verse on the club's tenth anniversary.

The club frequently made use of satire, humour and jokes, which created a relaxed atmosphere and amused visitors.

At club debates and discussions the speakers' platform often sported a notice with Kozma Prutkov's words "BETTER SPEAK LITTLE BUT BETTER". This grave warning helped to ensure that correct procedure and time-limits were observed.

Even the club's advertisements were somewhat unusual. Erast Garin, a popular actor at the Meyerhold Theatre, thought up a series of mises-en-scène for the club's photographic display entitled "An Actor's Day". The aim of the display was to show that the actor's day could not be complete without the club. The photographs showed a miserable Garin at rehearsals, taking a stroll, visiting the barbers, and shopping. Only by the club poster did he begin to smile, and in the club itself his delight was beyond description, even when he was listening to a lecture on aesthetics....

The life of the club began to be reorganised. It was necessary to find different forms of activity, to catch the actors' interest in some way, to touch their professional "cords". All forms of art are good except boring ones. This maxim is equally applicable to the activities of clubs.

At that time many clubs were in the habit of organising "trials" of literary characters. These trials were conducted according to all the rules, so to speak. There were a jury, prosecutor, defence, witnesses and even experts where they were needed. Onegin was found guilty, Tatiana innocent, and Lensky received a public reprimand for the excessive irascibility which led to his sad end.

As the club's first anniversary approached, Felix Kon suggested that instead of a formal meeting there should be a "mock" trial of the club on the charge of having worked so well, unlike many other clubs. It was proposed that the club management should be the accused.

Kon himself was the judge. He was assisted by the well-known actresses Olga Pyzhova and Rina Zelyonaya. He introduced one as the "court" secretary and the other as the secretary "caught". The trial opened with a menacing announcement by the "commandant":

"I declare this case open. Kindly stand (most of the spectators took this request seriously and stood up) ... those who have not paid their membership dues!" the "commandant" continued to gales of laughter from the audience.

Then the text of a statement by members of the board who actually did not work was announced; it had been written without their knowledge. It said that these members disassociated themselves entirely from the club's heinous crimes, for they not only refrained

from working themselves but prevented others from doing so. As a result the jury, after consultation, decided to have as the "accused" a director who was carried onto the stage by a group of gymnasts.

At this point the court passed a "separate decision" to the effect that the gymnasts were concrete "bearers of evil", and that the director must be regarded as the club's main evil.

Cross-questioning began of the witnesses and accused. The witnesses included an inveterate billiard player who rushed onto the stage with a cue and two balls, protesting against the many evenings and lectures which distracted players from the billiard table. An amusing vocal quartet from the Satire Theatre demonstrated its "art" as evidence of the club's negligence in not inviting this group to take part in its serious musical evenings. Those fine old masters of the stage, the Adelgeim brothers, testified that they had been "rudely refused" membership of the club's youth section.

A regular at the club restaurant, Vladimir Khenkin, protested against "prohibition" in the club and proclaimed the alcoholics' motto: "If vodka interferes with your work, give up ... work!"

The accused requested the court to take into account his youth and inexperience: he would do his utmost to ensure that everything in the club ran smoothly.

Felix Kon announced the verdict of the jury: "that the Theatre Workers' Club is guilty of an inordinate number of 'activities' and that the director be sentenced to ten years' compulsory reduction in the number of lectures, talks and debates by increasing the number of *kapoustniks* taking into account his preliminary one year of 'imprisonment in the club'."

It was also then that Natalia Satz had the idea of organising a trial of playwrights who avoided creating female parts. This was a kind of "women's revolt" by actresses who could not use their talent in plays on contemporary subjects. It was also a protest against playwrights' underestimation of the role of women in the building of socialist society.

This time the "accused" were Yuri Olesha, Valentin Katayev, and Eduard Yanovsky. The playwrights V. Kirshon, A. Faiko, B. Romashov and V. Vishnevsky, who did not put in an appearance, were sentenced in absentia. The jury consisted of N. Satz, S. Birman, J. Glizer, Y. Shatrova and N. Rozenel. Meyerhold, the actress L. Bronskaya and the playwright A. Glebov were invited to act as counsel for the prosecution, the latter having won this right with

Vsevolod Meyerhold. Cartoon by the Kukryniksy trio

Inga, the only "women's" play written at that time. Counsel for the defence consisted of the actresses V. Massalitinova, Z. Raikh and the critic V. Blyum. The critics P. Novitsky, M. Zagorsky and V. Mlechin were called in as experts.

A great deal about this "trial" would seem naive and ridiculous today. But times were different then and so were people.... It was a period of heated debate, verbal duels and ... incredible confusion on questions of aesthetics and the theory of art. However, the basic charges brought against the "accused" were perfectly correct in principle.

The playwrights were charged with the following crimes: paying insufficient attention to the characters of outstanding women revolutionaries, to the active part played by women in the Civil War and in socialist construction, and to the complexity and variety of modern female types.

At this "trial" Olesha attempted to formulate the "theory" that "the revolution is men's business—a time when men get even with

one another". Katayev based his defence on roughly the same "argument". Only Yanovksy pleaded guilty on all charges and assured the crowded auditorium that in future he would try to write plays with proper female parts. The actresses were naive enough to believe him and rewarded him with tumults of applause.

Meyerhold, as always, produced an original argument and announced that women should take over "men's roles" on the stage, as well as in real life, by acting parts written for male actors.

"Give me the actresses and I'll make a Khlestakov and Hamlet of them, a Don Juan or Chatsky!"

"What about me, Vsevolod Emilyevich?" came the voice of Blyumental-Tamarina, who was well into her seventies at the time.

Although the playwrights' "trial" was a semi-humorous event, it aroused discussion in the press about the position of actresses in the theatre and the shortcomings of contemporary drama.

After this memorable "trial" Meyerhold and Raikh became more frequent visitors to the club.

The club often had foreign guests. I remember in particular the visit of the well-known Chinese actor Mei Lan-fang in 1933.

The Pimenovsky cellar was "crammed" with actors. Meyerhold, Eisenstein, Moskvin and Tairov were sitting closely together in the packed audience.

Mei Lan-fang gave a brilliant display of the polished Chinese acting technique which verges on acrobatics. Each movement, each gesture was calculated with mathematical precision.

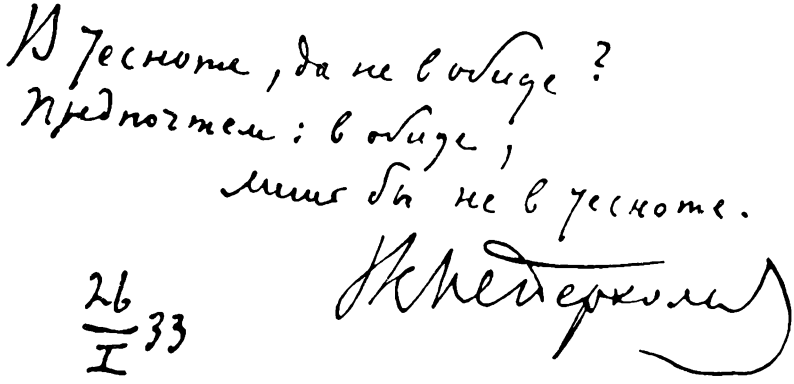
For Meyerhold, who had studied biomechanics, the display was of particular interest. At the end of the performance the audience showered questions not only on the Chinese guest but also on Meyerhold.

Meyerhold expressed his most sincere admiration of the Chinese actor's technique, but when asked what this system had in common with biomechanics, he replied:

"Nothing at all.... What serves as a basis for Chinese theatre is simply an auxiliary device for me."

When I asked him to write a comment on the evening in the Visitors' Book, he said:

"If you want my impressions, the main one is of the incredibly stuffy hall."



He left the following entry in the book:*

Meyerhold was a truly remarkable person. The spirit of negative criticism seemed so deeply imbedded in him that nothing and nobody could evoke an encouraging response from him. Yet in many respects his caustic manner was only a façade: he used it as a kind of "producer's device" to counter a real or imagined enemy, and occasionally simply as a means of ending what he regarded as a boring conversation.

I frequently saw him discard the mask of peevishness and unsociability which he used to don.

I observed him at the club in lively, friendly discussion with people whom he rightly thought of as sharing his views, or simply with actors, artists and musicians whom he liked. These included Kachalov, Radin, Yuryev, Moor, Cheremnykh, Glière and many others.

I watched him at club concerts, enthralled by the virtuoso playing of Heinrich Neuhaus or Jascha Heifetz when the latter was on a guest tour in Moscow.

I also saw his amused reaction to an exhibition of humorous cartoons and caricatures by the then young Kukryniksy trio. Meyerhold laughed genuinely and most infectiously, commenting

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* "Packed like sardines, but not offended?
We prefer to be offended,
anything rather than being packed like sardines.
"V. Meyerhold."

on individual drawings to Zinaida Raikh who was accompanying him.

And I saw the respect in which he was held by actors, irrespective of the theatre in which they worked. Meyerhold's genius was recognised by all. People may not have agreed with him and may not have liked him, but no one could deny his extraordinary talent.

"THE STORMY PETREL"

In spring 1931 Moscow was awaiting impatiently Gorky's return from Italy. He left Sorrento on May 9 for the Soviet Union, travelling via Rome.

On May 13 he arrived at the frontier station of Negoreloye where he was met by a delegation of writers.

The same day, en route to Moscow, Gorky was given an enthusiastic welcome in Minsk, and the following day in Mozhaisk.

On May 14 the great writer was met at the Byelorussky railway station in Moscow by Kuibyshev, Bubnov, Yaroslavsky, Kon and numerous representatives of literature and the arts.

Gorky's arrival became a major public event.

Three weeks after his return to Moscow the editor of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* telephoned with the request that a meeting of budding writers with Gorky should be held in our club.

"You must have heard about the appeal to enlist shock-workers into literature? Gorky has agreed to give a talk to members of our newspaper's literary club. We've been racking our brains where to hold the meeting and decided that the best place would be your cosy little cellar...."

Although this meeting had no direct connection with the Theatre Workers' Club, we were delighted to agree to it being held on our premises. And no wonder! The chance to see and hear Gorky at such close quarters was one not to be missed. The next day I decided to organise an exhibition on "Gorky and the Theatre" in honour of our

celebrated guest. I quickly got in touch with the Art Theatre and the Bakhrushin Theatrical Museum.

The great day eventually arrived—June 11. A large table was set for tea in the concert hall. The young people had already placed their pickets in the courtyard and near the club in Staropimenovsky Alley.

I was on duty at the entrance to intercept Gorky and take him through to the exhibition. The meeting was already due to start, but there was no sign of him. The organisers were making anxious telephone calls.

He arrived in Vorotnikovsky Alley where no one was expecting him, left his car there and walked a considerable distance through courtyards and back streets. The club door-woman, who had been strictly forbidden to let in any casual visitors, sternly demanded to see Gorky's invitation card. He did not have one, of course. We hurried to meet him. Young people rushed up from all sides and began to applaud the writer.

"You're a strict lot here.... I was just going back for my invitation card. Or they wouldn't have let me in to meet Gorky," he joked.

He refused to look round the exhibition.

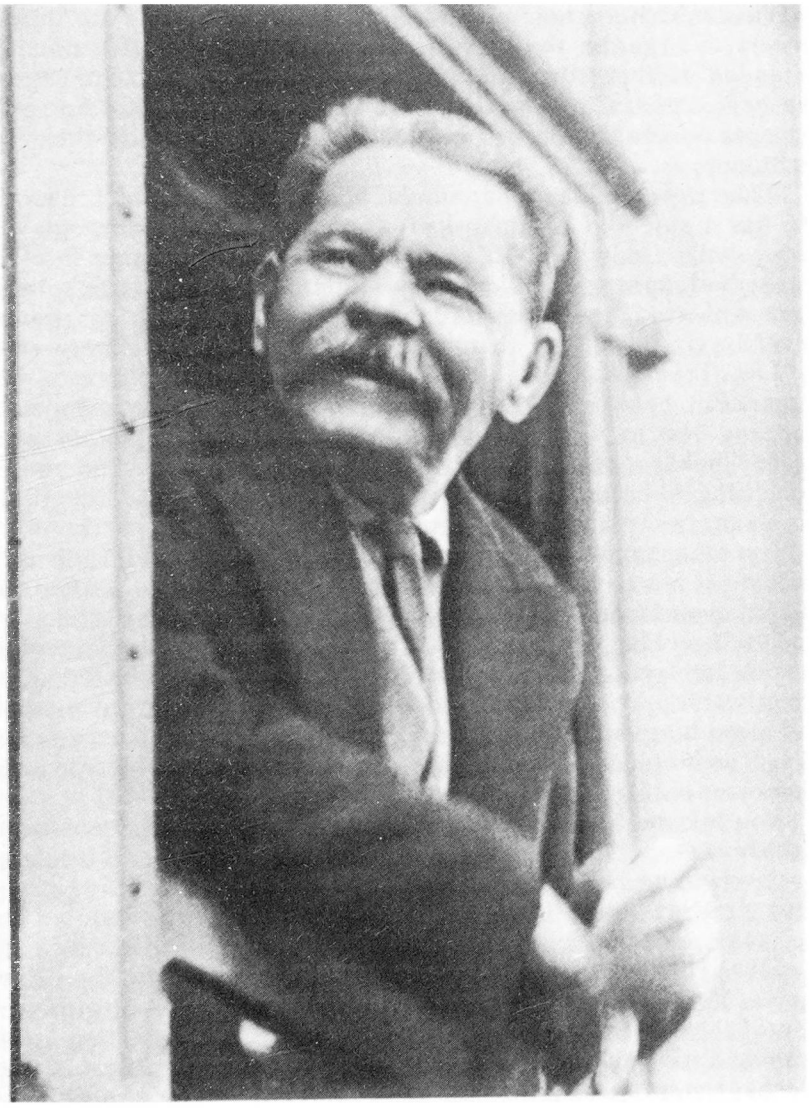
"Thank you, but some other time.... I owe the young people an apology. For being late. Don't want to hold them up any longer. We've lots to talk about. Show me the way."

We took him into the hall where the young people were waiting for him. They remained standing until he walked in and greeted him again with stormy applause.

Gorky motioned to them to stop clapping and began by saying that he himself would like to convey his warmest greetings to these shock-workers who were budding writers. More power to their pens, so to say.

Gorky said a great deal that evening about the struggle for ideological content and high standards in Soviet literature and about the richness of the Russian language.

"We are living in an age of revolution, when new words are entering the language. If anyone had used the word 'univermag' (an abbreviation for "universalny magazin" meaning "department store".—*Ed.*) fifteen years ago, people would have goggled at him. Perhaps we shall soon be saying 'mag' instead of 'magazin'. But even if we do, we must not forget the basic Russian language. We must know folk epics, not forget Russian folk tales and songs, and collect new proverbs, fables and rhymes.



Maxim Gorky, May 1931. Meeting at the railway station

"Finally, writers themselves should create words. It is our duty as writers to organise the literary language. Its vocabulary must be extended in all possible ways. Without this it is impossible to express the heroic nature of our times. Of course, we must also borrow a great deal from the classics and seek, above all, to master their fine technique.

"Take Dostoyevsky, for example. His characters speak brilliantly. He has a splendid command of word and speech, although one occasionally finds the odd slip like: "two matrons came into the room, both spinsters". Were they spinsters or not? Yet in spite of these unfortunate errors the language of Dmitry Karamazov can never be confused with that of Ivan or Alexei Karamazov.

"Lev Tolstoy's great literary merit lies in his plasticity, the remarkably bold relief of his portrayals. His characters seem to be standing next to you—you want to put out a hand and touch them. From Chekhov one must learn delicacy of language. And there's something to be learnt from Bunin too. An excellent stylist. All his stories are written like finely etched drawings.

"It is most important for the writer to study the period. Individual cases must not be typified. Characters created with real artistry and skill always contain typical collective features. If you are describing a lazy, self-seeking drunkard called Ivanov, you must generalise, because he, Ivanov, is not the only lazy, self-seeking drunkard, there are others too. So you take the nose from one, the ear from another, and something else from a third. Describe the type in such a way that all self-seeking people will recognise themselves in it. The type is the phenomenon of our times!

"You ask me how a writer should begin. I think he should start with short stories. Fill each page with as much content as possible, so that everything is like a single whole, a small egg. This is what you must aim for!"

Gorky spoke in a leisurely fashion, but with great conviction. His eyes flashed. You could sense that he enjoyed talking to the young people. Yet the tone of his conversation was not that of a lecturer or mentor, but restrained, modest and respectful to his audience. He expressed his thoughts as if seeking advice from them, as if asking: "Perhaps you don't agree with me, eh? Perhaps I'm wrong?"

The audience listened motionless to Gorky and showered him with questions at the end. But this was preceded by a short break during which tea was served and tasty sandwiches with smoked sausage, cheese and even black caviare, which was a real rarity in those years because food was scarce then.

During the break Gorky left the hall to make a telephone call and was brought to my office.

I do not know whether it was accidental or deliberate, but there was a group of Vakhtangov theatre people in the club who were lying in wait for Gorky in the narrow club corridor and besieged him with requests to visit their theatre. Gorky promised to come to see Lensky's vaudeville *Lev Gurych Sinichkin* in which Shchukin was playing the main role.

"I'll come, definitely. What's more, I've just finished a new play, *Yegor Bulychov*, and I'd like to read you some of it one day. It's not a comedy, of course, and certainly not a vaudeville, just 'scenes from everyday life'...."

Gorky said a warm goodbye to the Vakhtangov actors and returned to the young people. The talk was resumed and the writer answered the numerous questions....

One of those present at this memorable meeting was V. Bolkhovitinov, then a shock-headed young factory lad who later became chief editor of the popular magazine *Nauka i Zhizn* (Science and Life) with a circulation of several million. He recently recalled this memorable talk with the great writer.

"It is a well-known fact that Gorky considered himself a poor speaker. Perhaps he really did find it difficult to address a large audience, but we had never heard a finer speaker. The talk did not follow a definite line. It developed just as thought develops. In fact, it really was a talk. Gorky spoke without consulting notes, slowly and thoughtfully. He answered the questions straightaway. The people sitting in front of him were very young, just crossing life's threshold. And it was about life that he talked. His whole conversation about art was firmly linked with what was happening in the world.... These were serious times, and young people grew up quickly. Gorky knew that his audience consisted of young workers who were good at their jobs and had not yet switched to literature. He did not try to simplify his ideas. He was sure that we would understand him, and seemed to be telling us about things which were important for him, too, to understand and think over.... Gorky moulded his words slowly, and set our brains working.... We felt that literature was a serious and sacred cause. And Gorky confirmed that it was a very serious one."

However, all good things come to an end. Alexei Maximovich put the closing remarks to the long talk.

The young people accompanied him to the car with shouts of "Goodbye, Alexei Maximovich! Goodbye, our Stormy Petrel!"

THREE MEETINGS

It was autumn 1931. Moscow factory workers who had distinguished themselves on the labour front were presented with high government awards.

The club prepared to meet the first recipients of the Orders of Lenin and the Red Banner of Labour, shock-workers from Moscow factories.

It was only natural that the organisers of this meeting should be most anxious to have a "shock-worker" from the Soviet theatre, Stanislavsky, as one of the hosts on this occasion.

The most active club members tried hard to persuade Moskvin to invite Stanislavsky to the meeting. We met with determined resistance, however. Moskvin even lost his temper:

"For goodness sake! We never even see Stanislavsky at the Art Theatre. We go to his home for rehearsals. No, I can't be a party to this enterprise!"

It was quite true that during the last few years of his life Stanislavsky was often unwell and did not leave his house in Leontyevsky Alley, where he lived carefully protected by the Art Theatre, relatives, and his doctors. On October 29, 1928, the theatre's thirtieth anniversary, he appeared as Vershinin in *The Three Sisters*. In the very first act he had a heart attack. This was the danger signal. After that ill-health kept him to his bed for a long time. Subsequently he wrote to Professor Margulis, the doctor who was treating him:

Konstantin Stanislavsky

"I remember that fatal evening of the anniversary performance after which you drove me home. I remember you in a dinner-jacket, looking after me, gazing hard and affectionately into my eyes to see whether I was just ill or dying. I shall never forget the second anxious night with even more worry and concern...."

Had we realised at the time how serious Stanislavsky's condition was, it is most unlikely that anyone would have dared to trouble him. But a mass of legends and well-meaning anecdotes had grown up round his illness. Many people thought that the long years of compulsory staying at home were actually preventing his recovery and that he was being persuaded that his health was poor. Even Moskvin believed that the regime prescribed for Stanislavsky was turning him into a hothouse plant: "They open the window and think that Stanislavsky is going for a walk! How can anyone get better without exercise and fresh air!"

Plucking up my courage, I decided to ring Stanislavsky at home in the hope of speaking to him personally. His wife, the actress at the Art Theatre Maria Lilina, answered. After listening attentively to my request she expressed her doubt as to whether it could be granted, but promised to "see how the land lay".

Realising that the prospects were somewhat bleak, I immediately sent Stanislavsky a letter by hand, typed on official club notepaper.

When I arrived at the club the following day I was told that someone had telephoned from Stanislavsky. He would be pleased to see me at his home. My first thought was that someone was playing a practical joke on me. But how could I check? Would it be polite to ring and ask? They were (and still are) very fond of playing tricks in the acting world. But all the same, believing in the impossible, I ventured to phone Stanislavsky's flat again and ... received confirmation from his wife.

Need I describe my excitement before that first meeting? I felt as if I were about to scale the highest mountain in the world that day. I went to Leontvevsky Alley at about four o'clock. The weather was foul that autumn. Drizzling rain and sleet. Walking towards me was a group of actors from the Stanislavsky Musical Theatre. They looked pleased and were conversing animatedly. They had just finished a lesson with Stanislavsky.

I was taken into a large drawing room with four columns, which had been turned into a rehearsal room. Looking at the modest furnishings, I tried to commit each detail to memory, and came to only when a remarkably dignified and handsome man with beetling grey brows and slightly screwed-up young eyes entered the room.

Even in a domestic setting Stanislavsky looked elegant, in a stiffly starched, shining white collar. Adjusting his pince-nez, he coughed lightly and said:

"How do you do. Please sit down. I asked you to come here so that I could apologise to your club officials.

"I should very much have liked to meet the heroes of labour," he continued. "But unfortunately my doctors do not let me attend any functions. I am still under house arrest by my doctor. I have read a great deal in the papers about the fine work at the factories. What a high level of consciousness! I always tell my actors that only a conscious, creative attitude towards work could produce the necessary results. Yes, we have much to learn from the factory shock-workers. Give them my warmest greetings. I trust your guests will not think badly of me. Here is a little gift for them."

Stanislavsky pointed at a small pile of books prepared on the table. It was the first edition of his work *My Life in Art.*

"There are only five copies, I'm afraid. I would gladly have given more, but they've all been taken. Please distribute them to your guests. I've signed each copy. Tomorrow I'll send you a letter which perhaps you would be kind enough to read out at the meeting. Please ask those who do not get a copy of my book to forgive me. Invite them to visit our theatre. All my comrades will be delighted to see them, just as I myself will."

After thanking Stanislavsky warmly I returned to the club. The next day we received a letter to our guests signed by him.

"Moscow, November 19, 1931

"Dear Comrades,

"I very much regret that health does not permit me to greet you, heroes of labour, in person and tell you about our purely artistic work But since it cannot be described in a letter, I have taken the liberty of sending five copies of *My Life in Art.* Perhaps some of you will be interested enough to read it.

"For the time being, on behalf of myself and my comrades in the Art Theatre, I send you all most sincere and cordial greetings and admiration of your heroic and productive activity.

"People's Artist of the Republic, K. S. Stanislavsky."

Stanislavsky's letter was read out at the meeting, and the books were raffled.

It would be difficult now to find the fortunate possessors of a copy of the first edition of *My Life in Art* signed by the author, the brilliant creator of the world famous "Stanislavsky system".

Delegation from the Masters of Arts' Club at Stanislavsky's

In the spring of 1935 we celebrated the club's fifth anniversary.

On March 27 Stanislavsky received a delegation of club members in connection with this modest event. His health had improved, but his doctors still refused to let him out of the house. This time Ivan Moskvin agreed to open the "diplomatic negotiations".

The reception of the delegation was arranged for four o'clock. We had prepared flowers and a small concert as a gift for Stanislavsky.

Before setting off Moskvin assembled the delegation in the club and warned them strictly that Stanislavsky must not be tired with unnecessary questions. At the set time we entered the drawing room where I had first met him. The arrangement of stage constructions, the makeshift curtain and the theatre props showed that Stanislavsky had been rehearsing here with actors a short time ago. Tea-tables had been laid for us hospitably. We waited in tense, solemn silence for the appearance of Stanislavsky who had retired into another room with Moskvin to find out what his guests wanted from him.

Stanislavsky came towards us with a brisk gait, bright and smiling, and was greeted by a round of applause. He looked attentively into the eyes of his guests, greeting each of them, and giving a

particularly warm welcome to those whom he had not seen for some time. In appearance he had aged, the wrinkles were more deeply etched from his eyes to his temples.

After the slight commotion our host took his place at the head of the table. There was a longish pause. They had all looked forward to this meeting, but no one would start the conversation, perhaps because they were all taking a long look at Stanislavsky and trying to commit the dear face to memory. Even Moskvin was silent. I had never seen him like that. In Stanislavsky's presence he felt like schoolboy who had done something wrong. "Why on earth did I bring them here to see Stanislavsky," seemed to be written on his face.

The tension was very simply relieved by the host himself, who announced with a charming smile:

"A pause must always be justified. I think we've 'overdone' it here. How nice, after not leaving this room for seven years and not seeing anybody, to have such welcome guests. Who's the author of this nice idea? I have heard a great deal about your club. It is good that actors at last have somewhere to relax and meet in a creative atmosphere. You will tell me about its activities, won't you? I'm out of touch with the theatre world and there's so much I don't know now. There used to be only gambling clubs. But in yours everything is different...."

And Stanislavsky literally "besieged" us with questions about the club. It was my duty to introduce the members of the delegation to our host. He reacted differently to every name:

"Birman."

"Ah, you and I are old friends!"

"Mikhoels."

"I've heard a great deal about you."

"Zinaida Raikh."

"Didn't recognise you in that hat!"

"Khenkin."

"Well, I never! The last time we met was in Odessa."

"Barsova."

"I've heard some wonderful things about you recently!"

When the ceremony of introductions was over, Stanislavsky spread out his hands and said:

"I'm amazed at anyone remembering so many names. If I were asked to give all the names of my actors I would find myself in a most difficult position. Perhaps it is because I don't go to our theatre. I work in this room now and use a new method of directing. I have to imagine everything as if it were taking place in the theatre, on the

stage.... But all the same—we're living in a good age for our theatre."

Stanislavsky turned the conversation to the difficulties which were being experienced by people in the arts abroad, quoting as examples Gordon Craig and Max Reinhardt:

"I've heard that Craig is coming here? My wife visited him six years ago. Apparently he was finding things very hard then. They say he has a most talented son. But he himself, with his simplicity and depth, is a remarkable artist. More than that, he's a brilliant person. I've been told that he is offended with me for having written badly about him in my book. This is obviously a misunderstanding. I wrote that in his search for new forms Craig used screens in our theatre, but just before the beginning of the performance they began to fall down, one after the other, because we had made them so badly. Craig took this as an attack on him, whereas in fact I was reproaching only myself.

We simply could not put his idea into practice. When he comes to Moscow I shall explain everything to him. It would be nice if Reinhardt came as well."

"I saw his production of *Die Fledermaus* in Riga," said Barsova. "It was marvellous."

"When he put on *Die Fledermaus* at the Pigalle theatre he was fascinated by the rising stage, and this external effect obscured the main, basic things...." Stanislavsky took her up. "It would be nice to gather all the great talents here. Only here can they show themselves in full force."

Then came our turn to ask questions.

"What gives a person in the arts the right to the high title of master?"

"A master is, first and foremost, a person who is capable of reaching the main aim of our art—embodying life's truth, human spirit in artistic images. One must be able to fill the auditorium, which has excellent 'acoustics for emotions', with the rays of one's feeling. An actor cannot play to an empty house. If we could photograph the fluids connecting the actor with the spectator we would see that they flow from the stage to the audience and return back to the actors.... An actor must have perfect control of his inner and outer 'apparatus'. He must be a master in both. You cannot rely on 'inspiration' alone. You must make a profound study of nature and consciously master the approaches to the right scenic state. Of course, an actor's intuition, subconsciousness, have a definite significance for him. The famous Pavlov is said to be working in this

field at the moment. It is very important and interesting for our profession."

"Don't you think that all theatres and all actors should follow in the footsteps of the Moscow Art Theatre?" asked Dmitry Orlov, who was later taken on by the Art Theatre.

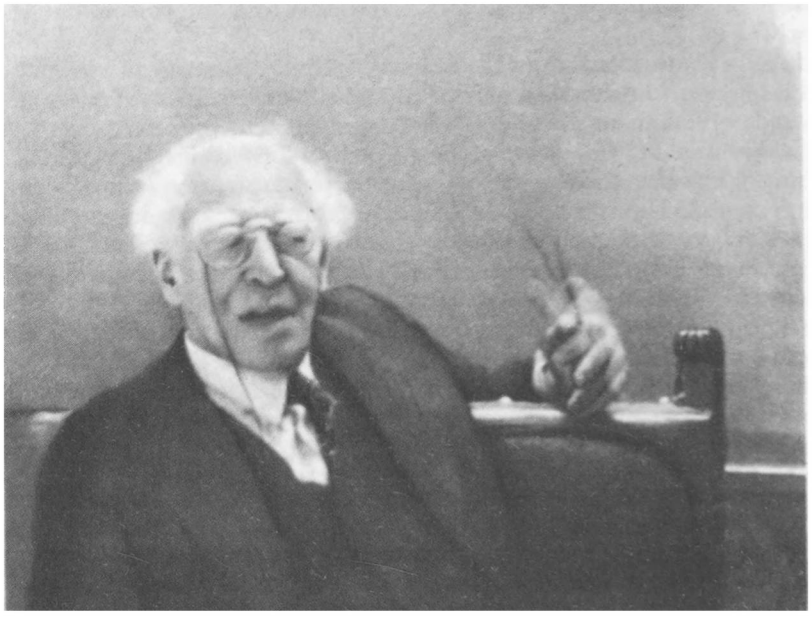
"There must be various types of acting," Stanislavsky replied. "I cannot imagine the theatre being restricted to any one style of acting. I recognise the most varied trends in the theatre, as in the arts in general, on the sole condition that they are totally justified and convincing. But if a 'trend' is artificial, if it is simply eccentricity, this type of 'creativity' violates the psychic and physical laws of man. Try singing for a week to the accompaniment of an out-of-tune piano and your voice will begin to go. You can take your physical apparatus 'in hand' and mend it. But the inner one, with which we create—our psychic apparatus, our nerves—all this demands even more careful handling. The actor must understand his nature and not come into conflict with it. This nature has its own organic laws which must not be violated. The artist who knows these laws will never resort to a 'kink'. Take the formal actor. However much you try to knock this formalism out of him, he will still be formal and dry."

Stanislavsky took a sheet of paper and sketched his system with a pencil.

"The lower section is work on yourself, the basic principles of our art. The first principle is activity. The second principle is expressed in Pushkin's famous aphorism: 'Truth of passions, authenticity of feelings in the presupposed circumstances—this is what our mind demands of the dramatic writer.' In fact all the so-called 'system' is based on this aphorism.

"I say *so-called*," Stanislavsky emphasised. "It was not simply invented by somebody. It is a generalisation of reflections not only on oneself, but also on others, reflections on the nature of creativity. Create the proposed circumstances and, if you believe in them, the feeling of passion is bound to appear. If this does not work there will be something different—*verisimilitude* of feelings. This is 'almost the truth', acting with the prompting of our real feeling: you act correctly, on the whole, but not altogether profoundly and sincerely.

"Then there is the *third principle*: one must be able to summon up *subconscious* creativity with *conscious* technique. Technique is an actor's ability to create the proper inner state of mind. Yet we must not forget that there is nothing more subtle than nature and our task



Stanislavsky talking about his system

is to understand it. We must command our feelings well, as the organist commands the organ.

"I try to record everything I can," Stanislavsky continued, "but it's not always within my powers. To do that you would have to be a physiologist, a psychologist, an expert on voice training, rhythmo-gesture and tempo-rhythm. That's a whole encyclopaedia!"

Stanislavsky dwelt in detail on the main points of his system and talked about his new book *The Actor's Work on Himself*.

"The book which I have just written is probably imperfect. Yet it may stimulate the creation of a system, forgive the awful word, but I know of no other!

"I believe that all masters of the arts need to write. Not only in general words, but to try and systematise their art. One must watch oneself, analyse one's creative process. It is from these observations that we can establish the immutable laws of our creative nature. The old masters bear a tremendous responsibility—they must not carry away with them the secrets of their profession, not patent them.

They must reveal everything honestly, because the young are bound to arrive at it sooner or later!"

Replying to the numerous questions, Stanislavsky dwelt in particular on working on a part.

"Say you've acted one piece, then another, a third, twenty-five pieces. Each piece of the part has been acted, but there is nothing general, basic. *A through action* should unite all these pieces and lead you to the *super-task.* This is the most important thing. Here is an example. A completely panic-stricken woman came to see me in Paris. It turned out that I had met her in America. She was a very talented American actress. She worked in the theatre, then left and went to study my system. I don't know what the people in charge of the school, Boleslavsky and Uspensky, taught her, but when she had completed their 'course' she returned to the theatre and ... began to act worse. Frightened to death, she rushed off in pursuit of me. She went to Nice, did not find me there, and eventually caught up with me in Paris. She clutched me and cried: 'You've destroyed me! You must save me! What have you done to me?' They say my method is being introduced in America, yet suddenly this talented actress who has studied my system 'withers away' before everyone's eyes. I had to take her on, if only to restore the reputation of my system. I wasted a whole month on it. It turned out that everything she had learnt was right. She had been shown and had studied everything in the school. 'Do you know about the through-line action and task?' 'Yes,' she said, 'they told me something about that, but I did not understand it.' Yet that was the crux of the whole system. So we started to proceed along this line. We broke up her part into pieces and made a chart of the main stages in the role. She understood them. I 'threaded them through': 'This is for that, this is for the other, and they are all for so-and-so.' When she had learnt this, she acted so brilliantly that we absolutely 'howled' with delight. Only an understanding of the through action and tasks can completely remake a person. Without this understanding everything is merely exercises on the system."

In reply to the question of how best to organise the study of the "Stanislavsky system" in order to avoid distorting and vulgarising it, Stanislavsky spoke of the need to set up at the Art Theatre a school for theatre producers, in which they would be trained primarily to teach.

"What a great task confronts all of us—to protect the young who are being crippled! Who goes to teach in village and workers' clubs these days? People who are not capable of acting even in the poorest

theatre. What will they do? They go and 'teach' in factories and villages. What do they teach? How can it be stopped? Of course, we need teachers. But the teaching should be done by you—masters of the theatre. I think if all theatres took this line and trained teachers, a great deal could be done four years from now. There is no definite programme yet, but one must be drawn up!"

Evening approached.... Many of those present had to go to the theatre and it was time to stop our talk. Stanislavsky became our spectator.

Before the small concert began, Serafima Birman and Solomon Mikhoels made speeches of thanks to Stanislavsky. It was no accident that they had been chosen for that mission. They were not just actors, but actor-philosophers.

Serafima Birman spoke on behalf of the drama students who had been greatly influenced by their meetings with Stanislavsky.

"I cannot change my psychology," said Birman. "What we learnt from Stanislavsky has influenced the whole of our creative life. How can we forget the warmth of your hands, Konstantin Sergeyevich, when you led us, clumsy and petrified, onto the stage during a dress rehearsal!"

"I often experience great difficulties in my work on a role, whatever it may be, large or small, comic or tragic," Mikhoels said with great emotion. "But all this is nothing compared with the difficulties which I am experiencing now, standing here, in front of Stanislavsky himself. I am one of the fortunate—not only because I am here next to you, but also because I had the great honour of seeing you as one of my spectators in the small hall, with ninety seats, in Stankevich Street.

"We were acting the play *The God of Vengeance* in the Studio. I have carried with me the critical comments you made then over the last fourteen years of my life. You are the teacher for all of us. What you say is the alphabet without which no sentence can be written.

"My late father was a clever, intelligent Jew. He used to tell me that life is an alphabet. Each person learns it. 'I began with "a" and got as far as "l",' my father said. 'But I hope that you, my son, will get as far as "z".' You have often said, dear Konstantin Sergeyevich, that you have not yet been able to complete your system of organised creative nature. But even if you have only got to 'l', to 'm', or to 'n' so far, you will eventually reach the end. You have shown us actors the way to work on ourselves. This is why we are looking forward so much to your second book."

Sergei Obraztsov at the meeting with Stanislavsky

Rina Zelyonaya. Cartoon by the Kukryniksy trio

Stanislavsky tried to conceal his emotion by coughing, fidgeting in his chair and polishing his pince-nez. We hasted to begin the concert.

But the strict, exacting producer and teacher turned out to be an unusually well-disposed and ingenuous spectator. He laughed heartily and infectiously listening to the Russian folk tale *The Clever Fellow* performed by Dmitry Orlov, the children's stories of Rina Zelyonaya, and Vladimir Khenkin's humoresques, and was absolutely delighted with Sergei Obraztsov's puppets. He particularly liked the puppet Carmen, evidently because the theatre bearing his name had worked on Bizet's opera.

Each performer in this memorable concert experienced a sense of great creative excitement and felt obliged to precede his performance with a few words addressed to Stanislavsky.

"I want art to play the main role in my life," said Sergei Balashov. "Today the 'proposed circumstances' of my performance are so unusual that I am afraid of losing 'verisimilitude of feelings'!"

"Don't worry, my friend," Stanislavsky joked in reply. "Today I am a very kind spectator, if only because I haven't seen anything for seven years...."

Balashov recited the literary composition *Turksib*; he was followed by Vladimir Khenkin.

"The last time we met, Konstantin Sergeyevich, was in Kiev in 1912."

"No, in Odessa," Stanislavsky corrected him.

"You were sitting in the front row, and Vishnevsky, I think, laughed louder than anyone else. I was reading a story about a person who saw *The Cherry Orchard* at the Art Theatre. We, variety performers, always have to bring in something topical. That's why we don't always have time to find the 'core' and 'through action' in our material. And this, dear Konstantin Sergeyevich, is why I have dreamed all my life of working with you, but actually work with myself...."

When Khenkin finished his performance it was a long time before Stanislavsky stopped laughing. Rina Zelyonaya gave the briefest and most vivid expression of her feelings.

"I feel as if my heart is about to break," she said.

In his book *An Actor With a Puppet* Sergei Obraztsov describes his impressions of his performance as follows:

"In 1935 I showed my puppets to Konstantin Sergeyevich at his home. It was during a meeting of a group of actors, active club members, with Stanislavsky.

"Konstantin Sergeyevich was greatly changed: he seemed to be all shining. Not only the grey hair, but also the complexion and the eyes—everything was shining. This plus his great height created the impression that a kind of special person had entered the room, who did not merge, did not mingle with the other people either internally or externally.

"We, there were several of us, talked to him, chatted, and asked questions, then put on a kind of concert specially for him, at which he was in fact the only member of the audience, for we knew one another inside-out. Stanislavsky is a marvellous spectator—sincere and ingenuous. There are specialist spectators who can perhaps give advice and judgement, but are quite incapable of watching. It is difficult to act in front of them. There is nothing of that about Stanislavsky. He laughs and enjoys himself enormously, his eyes sparkle with animation, and there is not the slightest hint of the appraising professional about him."

The concert came to an end. We thanked Stanislavsky for the pleasure, honour and creative satisfaction.

The delegates of the Masters of Arts' Club left the great master carrying away with them a profound impression from this meeting

and a precious gift—a photograph of Stanislavsky on which he had written:

"A club without cards, but with serious artistic aims. Forty-five years ago I tried to organise one and failed. It took another half-century for this to become possible. Well done!"

On January 17, 1938, the club officially celebrated Stanislavsky's seventy-fifth birthday. We were all hoping that the great man himself would be able to attend the meeting. However, several days before the event it became obvious that we could not reckon on his presence. His illness had taken a turn for the worse, and the doctors would not allow him out of bed.

Then Moskvin had a bright idea: "Why don't we organise it so that Stanislavsky can hear what takes place at our meeting in his home in Leontyevsky Alley? Why don't we have it broadcast?"

It was not possible to have the meeting broadcast over the radio at that time. But we discovered that we could transmit it over the telephone by fixing up a microphone on the club stage with an amplifier in Stanislavsky's room. In order to do this one of the telephones in Stanislavsky's house simply had to be "muffled", as the communication men put it.

The Moscow Telephone Service helped us to put Moskvin's idea into practice.

After receiving the permission of the doctor treating Stanislavsky and the consent of Stanislavsky himself we set about the job. Stanislavsky was delighted at the possibility of at least hearing, if he could not see, what was happening at the meeting in his honour.

"What a marvellous birthday present!" he told those around him.

Lying in bed at home Stanislavsky heard every word addressed to him. And the very sense of this direct link with him gave a special élan to the celebrations. What a pity there was no television at that time!

After an impassioned speech by Pavel Markov about the brilliant producer's work Stanislavsky's closest pupils and colleagues took the floor.

The hall was packed with actors from the Moscow Art Theatre and people from the Moscow theatre world.

The greetings rang out sincerely and warmly, commanding the attention of the audience.

"Dear and highly esteemed Konstantin Sergeyevich. Standing and talking to you at the microphone now is your friend, as you call me in your letters, your sixty-three-year-old pupil—People's Artist of the USSR, Moskvin. With your fine, devoted, unparalleled attitude to the arts you have the great gift of cultivating both the artist and the citizen in a person.

"Many was the time when you told us, then still young men and women, that an actor's mission was a responsible one, that we should be an example to others, because our life takes place in full view of the audience, who want to know us not only on the stage but also outside the theatre.

"How one must watch oneself and educate oneself in order to be worthy of the title of artist.

"And if I, a pre-revolutionary, provincial actor, have received the title of People's Artist of the USSR in Soviet times, have been awarded two Orders and, finally, have the great honour of being elected people's deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, I owe this largely to you, dear Konstantin Sergeyevich!

"I can never forget what you have done for me. I bow gratefully before you for the joy, the happiness, with which you have adorned my life!"

Speaking before the microphone Olga Knipper-Chekhova talked about the characters created by Stanislavsky in Chekhov's plays. She concluded her speech with some heartfelt words to Stanislavsky:

"I convey to you, Konstantin Sergeyevich, endless love and gratitude for making us all believe in everything fine and real that is given to the person who acts."

All the generations of the Moscow Art Theatre greeted their teacher that evening. And the other theatres of the capital joined in with these greetings.

Onto the stage came the universal favourite Boris Borisov, a splendid dramatic actor and at that time an unexcelled performer of Beranger's songs on the stage, corpulent, bald and pear-shaped in appearance, possessing great artistic charm. He had written an "anniversary ode" to Stanislavsky, using in it the names of plays which Stanislavsky had produced at the Art Theatre.

The "fluids" radiated by the auditorium flowed from the small club hall along the telephone cable to Stanislavsky, and returned back to it. Konstantin Sergeyevich was sincerely moved by this expression of affection. Shortly afterwards we received the following letter from him:

"Dear Comrades,

"My warmest thanks to you and all the organisers of the evening to celebrate my seventy-fifth birthday. Your kind attention to me and my activity has rejuvenated and heartened me and given me great pleasure which I shall never forget.

"People's Artist of the USSR, K. Stanislavsky."

In August Stanislavsky was no more.... But those who had seen and heard him if only once will always retain the memory of that fine creative personality whose name has gone down forever in the history of the theatre.

ACTORS MUST BE LOVED

When he heard about the meeting of club members with Stanislavsky, the latter's colleague in the Art Theatre, Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko decided not to lag behind.

All our attempts to invite him to give a professional talk at the club had hitherto failed.

At the end of March 1935, however, he eventually responded to these numerous requests and arrived in person.

Seeing the crowded hall, he gasped in surprise and spread out his hands:

"That's not fair, my friends. I am really allergic to addressing a large audience. It always means delivering a report. I prefer to discuss art in a small circle. So forgive me, but the entire responsibility will now rest with you, the organisers of this meeting. You forced me into it, so you must answer for the consequences of your trick!"

Whereupon he went up quickly onto the club stage, Nemirovich-Danchenko began his talk with a joke:

"I started work in the theatre at the age of sixteen.... It was so long ago that a 'public official' at the Art Theatre recently told me I was four times older than him. 'What's your age?' I asked. 'Twenty-five,' was the reply. So, according to his reckoning, I had reached my century. And throughout this century I have always enjoyed my work, as a reviewer, a writer of plays, a producer and a theatre director. But I must confess that I have never felt so responsible for my work as in the last fifteen years.

"I believe that before the October Revolution there was no trace of this civic responsibility in actors.

"Personally I must say that I have been thinking more and more about the future recently as I embarked on each new piece of work. Not about my own future, not about what will happen to me in heaven or in hell (more likely the latter, like Vera Komissarzhevskava for whom a priest refused to perform the funeral service).

"I have been thinking about the next two or three decades, about the future of the theatre, and asking myself what we have been teaching our audiences? Has the time not come to make a careful study of what we are doing? The spectators are what we are working for, although we sometimes say that we must not pander to their tastes. Meaning, of course, tastes which are out-of-date. Naturally, we should be above such demands from the audience, but this does not eliminate the need to respect the opinion of those for whom we are building the theatre.

"It is not for us to despise the opinion of the audience, to sav to it contemptuously: 'Don't get too big for your boots, my friend.'

"The history of the thearte does, of course, contain cases in which the audience did not do justice to fine works on the stage. If, for some reason or other, these works did not 'come through' to it, it doomed it to failure like Chekhov's *Seagull.* And the critics could not prevent them from being a failure.

"I was myself one of the reviewers who criticised Ostrovsky's later works which were not popular with the public. I even wrote about such a play as *The Dowerless Girl* that Ostrovsky had written himself to a standstill!

"And theatre-goers also accepted it thus: 'Oh, it's a bad play, the author has written himself to a standstill!' But is it really so?

"I remember the words of the old theatre critic Flvorov: 'The public is never to blame.' I was brought up to believe that the public does make mistakes, that it can easily be seduced by clichés and cheap effects. Yet suddenly 'the public is not to blame!' This was said by a critic of many years standing.

"Then I became convinced that the guilty are to be found on the stage alone. Either in the playwright's mistakes, or in poor production. And the modern audience is very different from the pre-revolutionary one. It is incredibly ingenuous. It is wholeheartedly devoted to the theatre.

"There is a door by my office in the Art Theatre through which I slip into the dress circle to see how a performance is going. I also observe the audience carefully. And I see a man with eyes flashing,

ladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko

engrossed in what is happening on the stage. Yet at the same time he is constantly fidgeting in his seat, coughing loudly, not realising that he is disturbing his neighbour. He is like the pedestrian who pushes everybody out of his way and does not care about anyone.

"Just imagine. *Carmen* is playing at the Bolshoi. The musical entr'acte is one of the finest passages in the opera. But the curtain has come down and the spectators could not care less about the music. They are whispering loudly, reading their programmes, or exchanging glances.

"One day Stanislavsky was acting in *Uncle Vanya*. The audience talked loudly throughout the first act. Likewise in the second. The third act began and the noise was as loud as ever. Stanislavsky stopped the performance and addressed the public:

"'You're not listening? Perhaps if you paid a little more attention, you would find it more interesting!'

"After this complete silence reigned in the auditorium. The atmosphere was re-established. And the play had a good reception. All this illustrates the need for hard work on the aesthetic education of audiences.

"When I think about the future of the Soviet theatre, I begin to dream of finding the fundamental principles for creating new classics. We must all work on this problem and in so doing make use of the classical heritage accumulated over the years.

"What happens today is either that the producer is carried away by the formal aspect of the production to the detriment of the actor, or that the actor in his desire to emphasise some feature of a character emasculates the ideological aspect of the role. In one theatre we see 'simplicity' stretched to the point of over-simplification, and in another so-called 'theatricality' kills both the playwright and the actor.

"I do not go to theatres to criticise or find fault. Like a bee flies to a flower to find honey, so I try to find in the theatre, first and foremost, that which typifies the Russian theatre and above all the Russian actor.

"I believe that today this is the most important task for our theatre critics. Theatre studies are conducted in our country on a broader scale than anywhere else in the world. Unfortunately, this science often ignores the main problems of the Russian theatre. I don't remember who thought up the joke that the best way to punish Shakespeare for his sins would be to make him read all the commentaries which have been written on his works by learned students of Shakespeare. Perhaps we should do less commenting and

tackle the current problems of the theatre? I know the brilliant Shakespeare commentaries by Storozhenko and Veselovsky. Talented men. But how often have I shuddered at the thought that actors might treat their commentaries as holy script. Even the esteemed specialists whom I have just mentioned interpreted Shakespeare and Schiller by proceeding not from free thought and the free character, but from a theatrical stereotype which imposed certain ideas on them. I, for example, feel that I can handle Shakespeare as a producer—in the sense of understanding and interpreting the essence of his works. And I am equally certain that I am quite incapable of doing anything with Schiller. I explain this by the fact that Shakespeare is closer, simpler, and more real to me. And if I cannot put on Shakespeare now it is only because I do not have the necessary acting material—possessing the vast range and temperament which are required for Shakespeare's works.

"The Russian actor has a salient quality—his simplicity. Perhaps the reason for this is that the Russian people are simple?

"I am very well acquainted with the types of actors of all countries. The French are always somewhat highly-strung, given to declamation and exalted feelings. The German actor is fond of 'stilts', false elation. The Italians are simple, but rather stereotype. In fact the problem of simplicity is by no means a simple one!

"One of the simplest Russian actors was the extremely talented and compelling Varlamov. He possessed no technique in the general theatrical sense, and he actually did not need it. Towards the end of his life, when he was ill, they used to wheel him onto the stage in a chair from which he did not even get up. Nevertheless what he demonstrated was marvellous. It was the simplicity of an actor who is completely at one with his role. Sometimes he took incredible liberties. Once I was in St. Petersburg, in the Alexandrinsky Theatre. I was sitting in the director's box, next to the stage. It was some sort of vaudeville. Varlamov came on to the stage and began to say something. Applause. Then he suddenly addressed me: 'Well, now, Vladimir Ivanovich has arrived, that means everything's alright!'

"I was most confused, but not him! He was a real favourite with the audience and could do no wrong. Varlamov's art was quite unique. For him a role was simply a motif. The melody was being gradually enveloped in the amazing accompaniment of the actor's inventiveness and thousands of details. He had the right to such simplicity.

"What is simplicity in art? Simplicity can also be worse than theft, as the Russian saying goes. There is a simplicity which is boring on the stage! I regard an actor's simplicity as a most precious quality if it is not philistine, trivial, tedious simplicity, not simplicity without an image, without a definite attitude to real events, without a correct assessment of life's phenomena. Only when these conditions are observed do I say that this is the simplicity of the Russian actor.

"The actors at the Art Theatre have the principal demand made upon them—to act nothing: not a character, or a situation, or an emotion. They must not act love, hatred or joy. This is roughly what Chekhov said at the rehearsals of *The Seagull* in the Alexandrinsky Theatre: 'It's fine, but the actors are "acting" too much. Everything should be "like it is in real life".'

"But how can actors 'act' nothing? The so-called Stanislavsky system is devoted to this. I know only its main points. I believe that he himself says there can hardly be three or four people who know his system well.

"And in that very same Art Theatre, where the actors work very simply, there is a trend which should be treated with the greatest caution. That is the search for real feeling. The aim of this approach is not to act anything, not to feel anything, but to reflect everything vividly, to quote the magnificent phrase of Professor Speransky, with the whole of one's trophics, one's nervous organisation. Where this is concentrated I do not know: in the solar plexus, perhaps, or in some other stimulant of the creative state, which eventually gives us angina pectoris. This trophics acts on the nerves which would normally have functioned on identical occasions. But this, of course, does not mean the total identity of feelings on the stage and feelings in real life. It would be ridiculous to think that what an actor feels on the stage corresponds exactly with what he would have experienced in the same situation in real life, for the actor is in a state of theatrical elation, creative excitement. Yet nevertheless when the trophics is in a state of creative joy it reflects in the nervous system everything which would have been reflected in life as well.

"I regard cultivation of the actor's intuition as one of the most important points in our programme. I have some ideas of my own on this question. Stanislavsky and I are continually coming up against this task. Perhaps it could be achieved by a profound study of the classics, a thorough knowledge of literature? Classical literary works indubitably help the actor to delve more deeply into the sphere of

psychology and explain many of the phenomena and principles of human behaviour.

"The alpha and omega of histrionic art for me is the actor. This is why it is essential to create in the theatre conditions which would give the actor full scope for developing his individuality.

"We producers should treat actors so as not to offend them. Not only for the sake of ordinary civility, but so that they do not lose the ground from under their feet. In order to achieve this we must love actors, for otherwise you cannot get anything from an actor. Actors have masses of faults, but I have always regarded them as the finest of people. We must not forget that the actor is the most important person in a production. This does not mean that the producer should be led by the actor. Sometimes it is necessary not only to pet, but also to use authority.

"For me the producer is a 'three-faced' creature. Firstly, he is the *interpreter*, the intermediary between the author and the actor. Secondly, he is the *actor's mirror*. He must reflect the actor, show the actor what to do and how to do it, sometimes even take him off. 'This is what you were doing. Did you mean to? No? Well, that's how it looked!' And, finally, the producer is the *organiser*. It is he who welds into a single whole all the components of the production—the decor, the music, the external and internal image and the behaviour of the actor. It is he who organises the complex action which in all its totality is called the production, seeking step by step to achieve its overall harmony. It is quite right that the final 'veto' should belong to the producer, although the success of the production in the final analysis is determined by the actor.

"We theatre people often try to analyse the cause of success or failure: 'It's the producer, it's the actor, it's the author!' But the actual audience, which is the most precious thing to us and for which we are in fact working on the stage, will not bother to go into these details, sorting everything into compartments: where it was the producer and where the author. They must both 'die in the actor'. The actor should absorb the author's words as if they were his own. If the actor keeps trying to remember the producer's advice when he is acting a role he will not be able to create on the stage. The public must take the author's words as his words. If during a performance the audience starts wondering whether these are Gorky's words or Chekhov's, that is bad.

"When I put on Gorky's plays, for example, I know his manner, I remember how he talks and I understand how he writes. I know his simplicity—strong, hard as iron, different from the graceful, lyrical

language of Chekhov. And I endeavour to convey this to the actor, as the main embodier on the stage of the thoughts and ideas of these great writers.

"From my youth I have loved the theatre, the smell of backstage wings, the smell of new posters, and, of course, above all, the actors. I have preserved this love to this very day. And if my dear producer colleagues sitting in this hall remember these words well, it would be the most delightful and precious reward to me for the evening spent in your company!"

The talk was over. The audience rose to applaud the speaker. Then we thanked Nemirovich-Danchenko with flowers and a special concert like the one for Stanislavsky.

I remember that the most popular treat for our dear guest were Sergei Obraztsov's puppets. Incidentally, Obraztsov had received some of his theatrical schooling in the Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theatre, under the great man's direct supervision.

Nemirovich-Danchenko laughed heartily as he listened to the comic dialogue between the actors Istrin and Azarin. They were both excellently made-up and gave a brilliant parody of a conversation between Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko. The act was based on the "professional disagreements" between the founders of the Moscow Art Theatre. Whenever Istrin's Stanislavsky said something, Azarin's Nemirovich-Danchenko immediately refuted it.

In conclusion a group of artists from the Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theatre, led by Vladimir Kandelaki, performed some vocal jazz, which was most popular at the time.

"I never thought I had such musical actors in my theatre," Nemirovich-Danchenko said jokingly to his pupils.

Before leaving the club he spent a while in the office with a group of club officials who were saying goodbye to him.

"How do you like our club?" I asked him somewhat bluntly.

"Allow me to draw a kind of parallel," he replied. "I have already told you that for me the central figure in the art of the theatre is the actor. If a theatre has a good director and administrator, but no actors there will be no theatrical art. It is essential to create the right conditions for developing the actor's individuality in a theatre.

"I think your club should concentrate on getting an active membership. Even if your director or administrator were a real Solomon, you would not have any interesting creative work without a body of active members. And you must know how to make use of

people. Believe me, the problem of 'developing individuality' is important for your club too. If you can find a synthesis which combines the individual interests of your club members with collective, public interests you are bound to be a success! From what I have heard about the club and seen today, I would say that basically you have already discovered this secret yourselves."

After wishing us success in the future, Nemirovich-Danchenko left the club. Walking up the steep staircase he turned, took off his hat, waved it as a token of his gratitude for the friendly reception, and said loudly, addressing those who were seeing him off:

"Remember, actors must be loved."

GREATNESS AND SIMPLICITY

The great Russian actor Vassily Ivanovich Kachalov was the perfect embodiment of noble simplicity both on the stage and in real life; his art contained vividly expressed national features of the Russian people.

Kachalov's performances at the club were always a great event in the Moscow theatre world. Another outstanding actor, Khmelyov, who departed from this life before Kachalov, called him "the favourite actor of the Russian democratic intelligentsia". Kachalov's life has become a splendid page in the history of Russian national culture: he always acted as the mouthpiece of humanism and was himself one of the most striking and progressive representatives of this intelligentsia.

His deep reverence for art can be seen from a remark which he once made: "For us each role is the birth of a new man."

Kachalov was one of those actors whose talent combines high intellect and wealth of emotion. These qualities helped him to delve down to the essence of a dramatic work and to give a philosophical interpretation of any given character. In Kachalov's acting art interacted with science.

That outstanding representative of Soviet medicine, Academician N. Burdenko, once said addressing a gathering at the club:

"I would not allow myself to appear before you if my activities—public, teaching, academic and professorial—did not contain elements of the art.

Vassily Kachalov

"How much art is required to combine in oneself the scientist, teacher and orator, without allowing any one sphere to dominate the others!

"And it is equally important for you, masters of the arts, to be acquainted with the sciences. Take Paganini, who performed miracles on the violin. This was because he had a knowledge of science. And just recall Leonardo da Vinci, who combined painting with scientific work.

"I heard Kachalov reciting the monologue of the Polish Ambassador. You must have a knowledge of the period and a deep understanding of history to read like he did!

"Thus, science contains elements of art, and art elements of science."

Both on the stage and in real life Kachalov was the embodiment of the noble simplicity about which his teacher, Nemirovich-Danchenko, had spoken in the club talk described earlier. In Kachalov's case this simplicity was combined most harmoniously with another, it would seem, contradictory feature — dignity.

His unusual delicacy and modesty could serve as an example to many of his confreres in the theatre. He never raised his voice to anyone or tried to force his views on anyone. He would listen attentively to whoever was talking to him, no matter how humble their position.

If he had to refuse for reasons of health or lack of time any of the numerous invitations to take part in club concerts he always felt extremely embarrassed and asked to be excused as if he had committed a grave offence. He frequently performed at the club and was always a great success. The audience usually gave the great actor a standing ovation as a tribute to his powerful talent.

Everything he read or acted on the stage was full of feeling and highly artistic. Whether he recited Pushkin, Gogol, Lev Tolstoy or Mayakovsky, or acted scenes from Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Dostoyevsky's *Karamazov Brothers* or Gorky's *The Lower Depths*—he always did so as a thinker and philosopher with a profound understanding of the work.

Almost every season the club organised a recital by Kachalov, whose name has gone down in the pantheon of the Russian theatre alongside those of Shchepkin, Mochalov and Yermolova. At these evenings it was difficult to decide who was more brilliant, Kachalov the actor or Kachalov the reciter. He liked reading Mayakovsky's *Aloud and Straight* and Bagritsky's *The Song of Opanas*. He was particularly good in "An Amazing Adventure of Vladimir

Mayakovsky". In his recitation of this poem the main feature of his art came across most clearly — his great optimism. With what faith in life he imbued the poem's closing lines:

Shine up on high,
shine down on earth,
till life's own source runs dry—
shine on—
for all your blooming worth,
so say
both sun
and I!

This was without a doubt Kachalov's motto as well as Mayakovsky's.

In 1933 at the request of the club board Kachalov acted as judge of the first Olympiad of Moscow and Leningrad reciters.

All the finest exponents of this art took part in the competition, including actors from drama theatres who also gave concert performances.

Kachalov was the chairman of the jury and highly appreciated the skill of Vladimir Yakhontov, Dmitry Orlov who was making his debut as a reciter, and Dmitry Zhuravlyov who had began his career as a reciter in our club.

Some interesting reciting contests were held in Kachalov's presence. The actor audience listened tensely as Vladimir Yakhontov and Anton Shvarts alternately read stanzas of Pushkin's *Count Nulin.* This unusual competition made it possible to compare the manner, style and nature of performance and the creative individuality of the two actors.

Kachalov's last performance at the Central Art Workers' Club was also his last creative meeting with art workers. At the end of 1947 he took part in an evening on the subject of "The Bolshevik Party in the Works of Soviet Art and Literature". He acted scenes from Vsevolod Ivanov's *Armoured Train No. 14-69,* in which as far back as 1927 he had created the unforgettable role of the peasant and partisan leader Vershinin.

I frequently observed Kachalov before he was about to perform. At such times he always sought solitude. He needed an atmosphere in which he could concentrate. Each time he seemed to be thinking over afresh what he was about to recite on the stage. He smoked a lot, removed and put on his pince-nez with a characteristic gesture, and sometimes sipped strong tea. By the soundless movement of his lips

one could see that he was repeating the text of the work he was about to perform.

Then the moment came for him to go on stage. He would stroll leisurely through the wings, calm, collected, dignified and handsome.... Pushkin's famous lines seemed to fit him more than any other:

Who serves the muses—shun ungainly fuss.
The beautiful should wear an air of grandeur.

Vassily Ivanovich Kachalov died shortly before the fiftieth anniversary of the Moscow Art Theatre, the stage of which he had illumined with the light of his talent for almost half a century. The great artist sensed the approach of the tragic dénouement which he evidently regarded as inevitable. He passionately wanted to live until the anniversary of the theatre to which he had devoted his labour, his creativity and his fine life.

AMONG FRIENDS

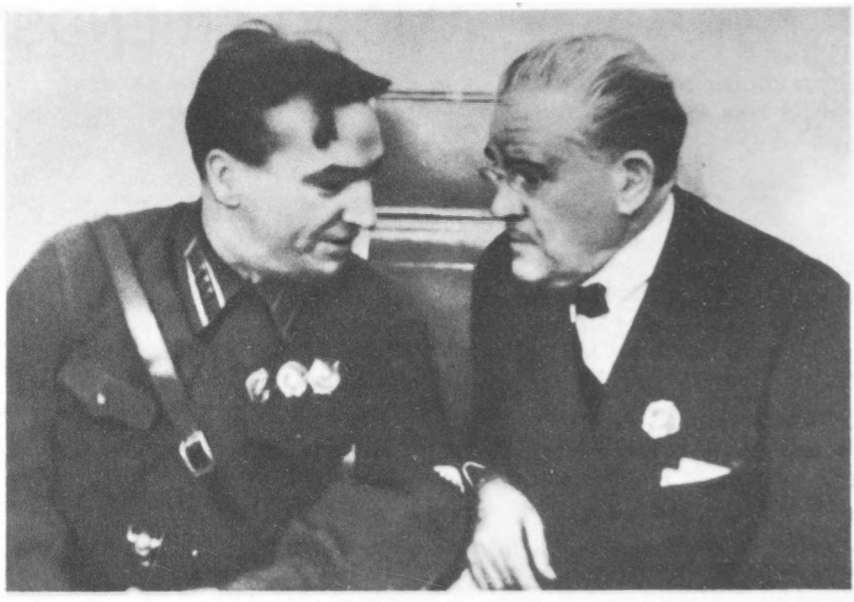
The small vestibule in the club cellar was known as the bath-house dressing-room, having been dubbed so by Moskvin.

Although it had no daylight, it was a favourite place with artists. Its walls were constantly being used for small exhibitions. More often they were occupied by the cartoonists. Cheremnykh, Rotov and Yeliseyev were particularly noted for their caustic and witty panels on topical theatrical issues. They were later joined by the young Fyodor Reshetnikov who had returned from a Polar expedition on the *Chelyuskin*. At times the Kukryniksy trio competed with them. Their caricatures were a subtle parody of the pictures by the Moscow artists. No one was spared at these satirical exhibitions.

One evening in spring 1936 I found the close friends, Moskvin, Klimov and Chkalov, in the "bath-house dressing-room" about to go into the restaurant which was run by an enthusiast of this institution favoured by all the muses, Yakov Rosental, whom the actors had nicknamed "The Beard". The abundant hair framing his oriental face fully justified this title.

The only person who could compete with the Beard's culinary erudition was perhaps Mikhail Klimov who had free access to the kitchen where he used to astound the cooks with his dainty and exotic dishes.

On this occasion the friends were lingering in the "bath-house dressing-room" to pacify an enraged Valery Chkalov. The pilot was infuriated by an exhibition of paintings by a young artist



Valery Chkalov and Ivan Moskvin

who had chosen the life of Soviet children as the subject of his work. The children on the pictures looked underfed, thin and puny.

"Where did he get children like that from?" growled Chkalov. "Is it meant to be a T. B. sanatorium? Or hasn't he seen any fine, healthy Soviet children? Hasn't he ever been to schools or kindergartens, or simply in the street?"

"You're right, Valery, it's a T. B. exhibition! We should have noticed before. He's a child-killer, not an artist! I think they'd better be taken down at once!" agreed Moskvin, nodding.

Many memorable meetings at the club with famous people, politicians, Heroes of the Soviet Union, and factory shock-workers took place with the direct personal participation of Moskvin. Our cellar was often visited by well-known scientists, eminent public figures, and famous generals. But a special friendship had sprung up between the actors and Arctic explorers and pilots. The meetings with the first Soviet pilot Chukhnovsky, with the "grandfather" of Russian aviation Rossinsky, and with the first Heroes of the Soviet Union Vodopyanov, Kamanin, Lyapidevsky, Molokov, and Slep-

Yakov Rozental (The Beard)
Cartoon by K. Yeliseyev

nyov, with the famous corps commander Smushkevich, and the well-known pilots Serov, Kokkinaki, Valentina Grizodubova, Marina Raskova and Polina Osipenko aroused tremendous interest in the theatre world.

But perhaps the most popular of this galaxy of aviation and Polar celebrities of the 1930s was Valery Chkalov. The fame of his courage and virtuoso skill, his unusual life, his biographical "ups and downs" was widespread among the public and had also won a deep affection for him among the creative intelligentsia. The heroic exploits that were attributed to this remarkable lad from the Volga! And as a rule they turned out to have really taken place. That he flew with the plane upside down or vertically, and the stupendous "spins", and the incredible flight over the Neva under the Troitsky Bridge. All this was the truth without the slightest exaggeration.

In 1936 Chkalov's name was on everyone's lips. The crew of the ANT-25 had just completed the first non-stop flight from Moscow to the Pacific coast, a distance of 9,374 kilometres.

The friendship of the famous pilot with Moscow's leading actors and artists dates from this year. How did it come about? Chkalov met Ivan Moskvin at a reception. Moskvin possessed the remarkable

Club choir of People's and Merited Artists of the Republic A. Sashin-Nikolsky, S. Mikhoels, V. Kachalov, M. Tarkhanov, V. Gorodinsky, A. Doroshevich, A. Bogdanovich, M. Klimov, L. Sobinov, A. Kramov, Y. Bovarsky, I. Moskvin, I. Bersenev and an accordion trio from the Meyerhold Theatre (Popkov, Kuznetsov and Danilov)

quality of instantly winning affection by his sincere conversational manner, gentle humour and inoffensive guile. But an official reception was no place for a long friendly chat.

"Come and see us, our 'circle', in the cellar. I'll introduce you to Mikhail Klimov and Alexei Tolstoy. We often get together chez The Beard. We'll give you meat-balls à la Klimov. Mikhail is a dab hand at cooking. We'll make sure everything is just right. And you must bring your wife, Olga Erazmovna. Our club is for late birds. We go there after the theatre, about eleven o'clock."

Chkalov became a fairly regular visitor to the Pimenovsky cellar. Gradually he gained a circle of friends with whom he found common language. Apart from Moskvin and Klimov they included the sculptor I. Mendelevich, his brother Alexander, the compère, and the well-known actor and booklover Smirnov-Sokolsky. This company was frequently joined by Alexei Tolstoy and Demyan Bedny. Although Chkalov was the youngest there, the conversation was always "on an equal footing". Actors and writers were amazed that

this young, yet already world-famous pilot, knew so much about literature, the theatre and the fine arts and expressed himself so sensibly and critically on various aspects of Soviet artistic life.

I often observed Chkalov at club concerts and recitals. How attentively he listened to recitations by Kachalov, how irrepressibly he laughed, not trying to control himself, when Khenkin recited Zoshchenko's stories on the club stage. And how eagerly he responded to native Volga songs performed by Lydia Ruslanova. Chkalov also liked Sergei Obraztsov's puppets. At the same time he was a true lover of classical music, an admirer of the talent of Lev Oborin and Heinrich Neuhaus who frequently played at the club. One of the great pilot's characteristic features was his respect for the work of actors. He said, quite seriously, that a real actor performing in a play experienced just as much nervous tension as he did on the most difficult flight.

"It's even easier for me than for you," he told Moskvin, "because, fortunately, when I am flying I don't have an audience in front of me. For me appearing before an audience and actually talking is more difficult than looping the loop."

For visitors to the club, particularly young actors, Chkalov was a highly romantic figure. Everyone knew how hard and stubbornly this powerful man had fought his way to the sky.

I remember that we invited Valery Chkalov to an official meeting to celebrate May Day. Naturally we wanted to see him on the platform in the presidium. But he arrived and took refuge right at the back of the hall. The actor audience noticed him and gave him an ovation. A voice in the audience shouted:

"Long live Hero of the Soviet Union Valery Chkalov!"

You should have seen how our respected guest reacted to this. He got quite angry.

"You should not greet me like that. It's our people you should applaud, not me. The people feeds us, gives us strength and the will to win! It gives us wings!"

After this reply the applause did not abate, but grew even louder. Moskvin had quite a job persuading Chkalov to come and sit at the presidium table.

Shortly after the first night of *Anna Karenina* at the Art Theatre in 1937 Chkalov's circle of friends gathered again at the club. On this occasion they were joined by Kachalov and Alexei Tolstoy. They were sitting in the lounge waiting for the dinner which was being prepared for them in the restaurant. Alexander Mendelevich was pretending to be "chief of police". According to the rules, everyone

had to obey his orders. Yaron and Smirnov-Sokolsky were particularly zealous in carrying out the instructions of the self-styled chief: one as a traffic-controller, the other as a fined pedestrian. Moskvin was given the role of an old woman on the black market who had just been taken to the police station. All this was pure improvisation. Moskvin tied a handkerchief round his head and gave an incredibly funny imitation of a crafty old woman selling soap at black market prices. Then came Chkalov's turn.

"Hero of the Soviet Union, Comrade Chkalov," Mendelevich commanded. "Give us a *shtopor*" (which can mean either a "spin" in aeronautical language or a "corkscrew").

Chkalov instantly pulled out of his pocket an all-purpose penknife, opened up the corkscrew attachment and handed it to Mendelevich.

Then there was the memorable meeting of Chkalov with Moscow actors, artists and musicians after his famous flight from Moscow to the United States over the North Pole. Moskvin was in the chair. The hall was packed to overflowing.

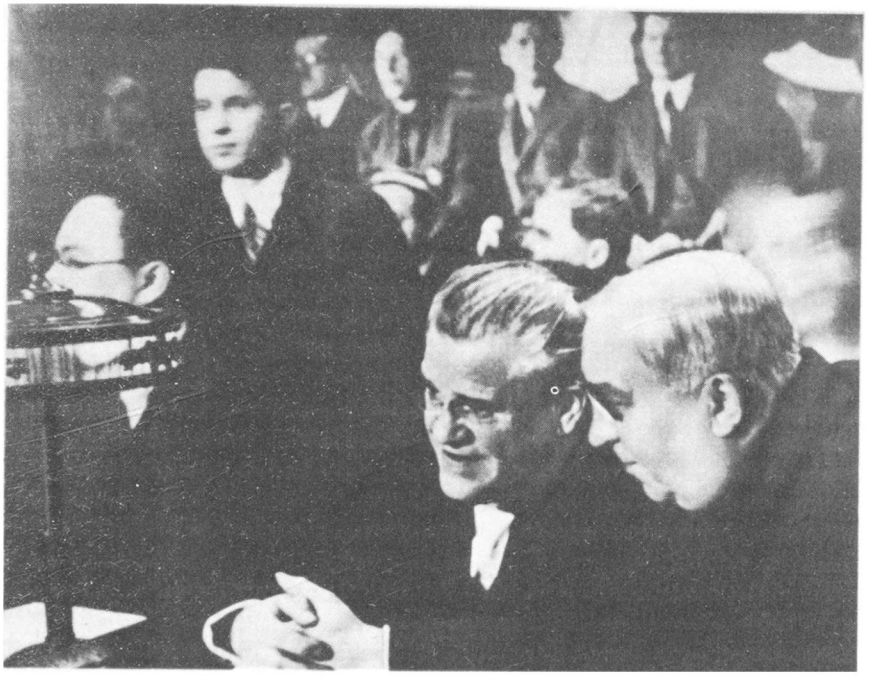
With his usual modesty Chkalov described the heroic flight, talking mainly about his friends Baidukov and Belyakov. Simply and modestly he told us about the details of the flight as if it could all be taken for granted and nothing special had happened. The cyclones against which they had battled had already been forecast in Moscow and "planned", the "blind flying" through the cyclone wall was also, it transpired, nothing out of the ordinary. The fact that the plane had become covered with ice was quite natural, it was just a "question of degree". The lack of oxygen was something you had to put up with. That could happen at a great height. But it was better than crashing into the Cordilleras. This was how he spoke from the platform, that remarkable man, and everyone listened to him with bated breath.

At the club Moskvin introduced the Moscow Art Theatre actor Belokurov to Chkalov. He was later to act the famous pilot on the screen.

How often the remarkable is right next to us, and we—with equally remarkable composure—overlook it.

In the last years of Chkalov's life many distinguished figures in literature and the arts met with him in the informal atmosphere of the club and at home....

When Moskvin consented to be a welcoming host for this or that club event, he was always most concerned about getting the right atmosphere. He sought to reduce formalities to a minimum, so that the visitors would feel at home.



Two friends — Ivan Moskvin and Mikhail Klimov at the opening of the club's branch in Ipatyevsky Alley

In preparation for the meeting with Moscow factory shock-workers in 1931 Moskvin and Klimov organised a comic club choir of People's and Merited Artists of the Republic. At that time all the actors with these honorary titles could be easily accommodated on our miniature club stage.

The choir sang some old army songs, such as "Nightingale, nightingale, little bird, the canary is singing a wistful song...." Moskvin himself conducted. At the piano was Alexandrov, the founder of the Soviet Army Song and Dance Company. The choir leader was Klimov, who accompanied the singing with a shrill whistling. Klimov did this with great skill, putting two fingers in his mouth. The choir consisted of opera singers and actors, singing happily side by side. The only thing which was common to all of them was their being "merited", so to say.

It was strange to see in the choir such great actors as Sobinov, the brothers Robert and Rafail Adelgeim, Mikhoels, Sadovsky,

Leonidov, Kachalov, Kramov, Petrov and Bersenev. Each of them was most conscientious, performing their mission most seriously, yet at the same time creating highly individual comic characters.

During one of the performances Moskvin unexpectedly stopped the choir with a wave of his baton, pointed it at Sobinov and admonished him sternly:

"You're off key, mate, something terrible. Where's your musical ear? What's your name, mate?"

"Sobinov!"

"Sobbin' awful Sobinov!"

And the choir continued to sing their rollicking "bird" song.

Hey ho, hey ho,—
Trouble we don't mind,
The canary sings a wistful song!

The choir occasionally acquired new Merited Artists. Only the conductor, leader and accompanist remained the same.

For a long time Moskvin played the role of the club's "live-wire". He was its real heart and soul, an invariable participant in the numerous concerts and *kapoustniks*, performing together with that fine actress Maria Blyumental-Tamarina.

In 1934 the Masters of Arts' Club began to "branch out". A small branch for artists appeared in Vetoshny Ryad, then in Ipatyevsky Alley, where another cellar was found for it.

By a strange coincidence this turned out to be the building where Moskvin was born.

"Well, I ought to feel at home here, shouldn't I?" he joked as he descended for the first time into the new "Ipatyevsky Cellar".

The opening of this branch was celebrated by the usual club *kapoustnik*.

At that time the Satire Theatre was delighting Moscow audiences with Shkvarkin's amusing comedy *Someone Else's Baby*. This production was universally acclaimed as a real event in the Moscow theatre world. The first Soviet comedy had appeared!

"We're just as good as they are," said Moskvin. "We'll call our programme *Our Baby*. Our new branch has just been born."

To give everyone the chance of seeing the show it was decided to put it on twice running. But on the second day something happened which nearly ruined the best act—a humorous tableau rehearsed by Moskvin in which Klimov, Pashennaya, Mikhoels, the Adelgeim brothers, Blyumental-Tamarina and Petrov, the bass from the Bolshoi Theatre, took part.

Valeria Barsova and Ivan Moskvin examining prizes awarded to the club

A large plywood panel depicting a children's choir was set up on the stage. It had openings for the faces and arms of the real participants in this comic choir.

The "first night" was a great success, but the next day Blyumental-Tamarina fell ill. It was impossible to get anyone to take her place. One "window" was empty, without a face. So Moskvin stuck a piece of paper over the opening and wrote on it:

"It's Maria Mikhailovna's day off!"

A brilliant solution!

At one of the club *kapoustniks* the audience was informed that Barsova would perform a vocal duet with ... Moskvin.

They both appeared on the stage with an accompanist, and Barsova with her usual skill sang the aria from *Manon Lescaut,* while Moskvin gave a silent imitation of her "cousin", reacting to the singing with appropriate gestures and mime. This mute accompaniment to Barsova's magical performance was full of delicate humour and demonstrated great artistic skill which was fully appreciated by the actor audience.

I remember Moskvin as the organiser of excursions to the Metro which was just built then, in 1935. Before it was finished he

and Klimov met the builders in the club, and later, on several occasions, visited the builders themselves, and even went down the shaft.

One excursion took place before the official opening of the Metro and began with a visit to the Okhotny Ryad station. Moskvin was absolutely delighted, like everyone else. He waved his cap as he went down the escalator, shouting:

"Follow me, lads! Into the inferno! I'm at home here alright!"

Shortly afterwards he organised a visit to the Kremlin Armoury. This was no easy business. The Kremlin was not open to ordinary mortals in those days. Everything attracted his attention, but he was particularly interested in Monomakh's jewel-studded fur crown.

"Nice little cap, eh! Better than the one I wear at the theatre. Wouldn't mind having it to act in *Tsar Fyodor.*"

When Moskvin was nominated for election to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, his first meetings with his constituents were held at the club. In his speeches he always managed to find a relaxed, intimate and prepossessing tone.

Together with Felix Kon he went to Leningrad to sign the agreement on socialist emulation between the Masters of Arts' Club and the Leningrad House of Arts. This journey established a tradition of exchanging entertainments between the Moscow and Leningrad art workers' clubs.

Moskvin played a major part in establishing friendly relations between the Moscow acting world and the Polar explorers from the very first expeditions of the *Sibiryakov* and *Chelyuskin* in the Arctic.

The club first made contact with Papanin's famous four-man crew when the icebreaker *Yermak* was still ploughing its way across the Arctic to Murmansk with the heroes on board.

At Moskvin's suggestion we organised a special radio broadcast from the studio for the Papanin four and the crew of the icebreaker. The famous actor delivered a cordial speech over the microphone and invited the heroic four to visit the club when they returned to Moscow. In less than an hour after the concert we received a reply transmitted from the *Yermak*. Papanin, Shirshov, Fyodorov and Krenkel announced that we had come over loud and clear and that, of course, they would not fail to take up Moskvin's invitation.

"Well now," said Moskvin. "Every mission needs a commission. I agree to be chairman, although you haven't asked me yet!"

Ivan Moskvin

Busy preparations began for the meeting with the heroes. Moskvin neglected nothing. A team of artists under Knoblok worked day and night on the club, turning it into a little corner of the Arctic. Cellophane icicles hung from the ceilings and walls. Even the piano was covered with them.

The experienced trio, Cheremnykh, Rotov and Yeliseyev, produced an Arctic panel. They were assisted by their "scientific adviser" Fyodor Reshetnikov from the *Chelyuskin*, an Arctic specialist.

The subject of the panel was how art workers would feel in the frozen Arctic. Just the same as they did in Moscow, it transpired.

Dressed in furs, snow-boots and caps with ear-flaps Tairov and Okhlopkov were fighting. Vladimir Khenkin was rushing about by reindeer from one concert to the next. Nothing had changed, in spite of the unusual "proposed circumstances".

The long-awaited day of the Papanin four's return to Moscow arrived.

"Better look sharp now, lads!" Moskvin warned us. "Everyone will descend on them. They'll be pulled to pieces. If we don't get them now, all your Arctic decoration won't be worth a penny. You'll have to open an ice-cream shop here. Take Khenkin, Obraztsov and Nabatov, the three funny men, and go to their flats!"

Next morning we started to round up the four.

Where should we begin? Khenkin knew Krenkel personally. We decided to go to him first. At 11 o'clock we arrived at the famous Papanin wireless operator's home. Krenkel came out half-dressed and embraced us all simply and affectionately like an old friend.

Without more ado Khenkin began his usual "spiel", bringing tears of laughter to our host's eyes. In the course of our talk Krenkel showed that he knew all the Moscow theatre news. He asked us about the latest productions.

After gaining his consent to the meeting we went on to Papanin, who had already been informed by a phone call from Krenkel. Khenkin had to hurry off to a rehearsal, so his place was taken by Obraztsov.

The staircase to Papanin's apartment was strewn with flowers. Young Pioneers patrolled the entrance. The crowd of children blocked our way:

"Where are you going? Papanin is having a rest!"

With difficulty we passed through the cordon of these voluntary sentinels and went in to see Papanin. The telephone was ringing all

Ivan Papanin with Ilya Nabatov and Sergei Obraztsov

the time. Children and adults alike were phoning to ask how he felt, express their best wishes and congratulate him on a safe return. Cameramen were trying to get into the flat, and school delegations with reports kept arriving. Papanin received us in the dining room. He looked tired, and no wonder.

"I tell you straight, it was much more peaceful on the ice than here in Moscow. We can't fight them off."

"Ivan Moskvin hopes very much that you will accept our invitation."

"Two Ivans will always come to terms," joked Ivan Papanin. "But we've got bosses. And that means we must obtain their consent first. We're in favour. Have a word with Otto Yulyevich Schmidt. He's the head of the Central North Sea Route Administration. But he's resting at his country *dacha* at the moment."

Next morning Khenkin and I sped over to Schmidt's *dacha* in Nikolina Gora, outside Moscow. The famous Arctic explorer was surrounded by such an aura of fame that we expected to encounter

serious obstacles on our path. In the car with us was Schmidt's secretary, Leonid Mukhanov, who had taken part in the *Chelyuskin* expedition and left the icebreaker before it sank. Together with five other members of the expedition, who included the poet Ilya Selvinsky, he managed to make his way across the ice to the mainland, on a special mission from Schmidt. Today he was on his way to obtain Schmidt's consent to a new business trip on the *Litke* icebreaker.

None of us had any idea what Schmidt's *dacha* was like. Even Mukhanov had never been there. We imagined that the Arctic explorer and well-known scientist would have a large, comfortable manor-house.

"He won't receive us just like that," muttered Khenkin. "The place is probably guarded."

Our amazement knew no bounds when an old woman pointed to a modest, two-storey cottage with a dilapidated verandah and no guards.

Khenkin examined the building sceptically:

"Is that all? If this is Schmidt's *dacha*, my place in Zelenogradskaya is a palace!"

We were warmly received by Schmidt's wife. The Arctic hero was resting on the upper terrace. He was lying in a folding cot. The breeze gently lifted the large, grey beard which we all knew so well. Hearing steps he jumped up and came to meet us, then shook our hands firmly.

He was particularly pleased to see Khenkin. He knew him from the theatre and concert hall and was very fond of the great comic actor.

"Aren't you afraid of catching cold after the Arctic?" asked Khenkin.

"That's no joke. It's easier to catch cold in this weather than in the most severe frost. I get ill much more often in Moscow than in the Arctic. Go on a guest tour there and see for yourself!"

Khenkin assured Schmidt that it was his dream to perform on a floating stage. We thought that after this exchange of pleasantries the success of our mission was more or less assured. Going over to the offensive, Khenkin handed our host a letter from Moskvin enclosing a photocopy of an entry made by Schmidt in the Honorary Visitors' Book.

Schmidt had been incautious enough to write the following: "After the cold and bleak Arctic how nice to get warm and relax

Vladimir Khenkin

within the friendly walls of the Masters of Arts' Club". We had decided to remind him of these words.

Suddenly things took a different turn. Schmidt changed his tone and said stiffly:

"I cannot agree to the appearance of the four. I must oppose it. Yesterday at a reception in the Kremlin it was suggested by the government that they should be allowed to rest and not appear in public."

"We have no intention of disobeying an instruction by the government. We want the Papanin men to rest in our club. And you are preventing us. So it is you who are disobeying government orders, not us!"

Schmidt burst out laughing at Khenkin's logic. After listening to the programme for the evening, he relented and gave his consent.

Moskvin was waiting for us at the club. We walked in with tragically gloomy faces.

"He's refused? Oh, what a fine lot you are! You couldn't even persuade him!"

"Yes, he refused," Khenkin broke in. "And whom did he refuse? Moskvin. The letter's from you, after all, and not from any old Stanislavsky, Nemirovich or Danchenko...."

Seeing Moskvin's disappointment, I could not restrain myself.

"They're coming, Ivan Mikhailovich, all of them. You can send out the invitations."

Two days later the guests arrived at our "Arctic branch". The entrance to the Staropimenovsky cellar was lit by a mock moon. Two actors in white bearskins greeted the visitors at the door. A third "bear", Sergei Obraztsov, appeared in the concert programme.

Khenkin joked in his usual way that Obraztsov was "bearly" doing the Papanin men a service. But it turned out to be to their taste. The act was a really splendid one.

Also very successful was the young Vladimir Durov who appeared with three sea lions to greet the brave four. The trained lions applauded the Papanin men for a long time with their flippers.

Moskvin took a great deal of trouble that evening, showing the genuine hospitality of a host entertaining long-awaited guests. He was a *responsible* person in the true sense of the word. He was just as honest and responsible in carrying out his public duties as in serving the theatre. And these duties were quite considerable and taxing.

I remember Moskvin's first concert at the club on April 3, 1935. He prepared himself for the performance as if he were about to be judged by the Moscow theatre world. He was extremely nervous and rehearsed almost every day on the club stage. Long before the beginning of the concert he retired to the room placed at his disposal, serious and concentrated. His lips moved silently, like Kachalov's, obviously reciting the lines of a role which he had played hundreds of times....

He performed scenes from the plays *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich*, *The Village of Stepanchikovo and Its Inhabitants* and *Dead Souls*. In each of the scenes he impressed his fellow actors by his remarkable talent.

At the end of 1938 Moskvin "resigned".

The Masters of Arts' Club had been turned into the Central Art Workers' Club. He had devoted a great deal of energy to this. But he found the new burden too much to bear—for in 1934 he had taken on the Staropimenovsky club presidency in place of Kon.

"We'll open the Central Art Workers' Club, then you can look for a new president. Barsova would be marvellous at the job. I'm getting hoarse!"

In early January 1939 a final effort had to be made to finish the

Valeria Barsova

capital reconstruction of the building intended for the Central Club in Pushechnaya Street. The work was being financed by money collected by art workers throughout the country at plays and concerts given to raise funds for the future project.

At the last moment building materials ran out. We decided to go to the "top".

Moskvin, Barsova and I were received at the Kremlin by Mikhail Kalinin who asked us to tell him in detail about the project and about actors' everyday lives. He was particularly interested in how old actors lived after they retired. The pension question had not yet been solved at that time. Moskvin gave a straightforward, realistic description of the position of the average actor, explaining that the rumours about actors getting vast sums of money were quite unfounded. Only a handful were paid high fees, and even these were often not at all commensurate with their talent.

"We must think of the old people, not only actors, of course, but old people in general. You and I will find this particularly easy to understand, Ivan Mikhailovich, bearing in mind our age," Kalinin said.

"If I were Mikhail Ivanovich instead of Ivan Mikhailovich I certainly would give it my consideration!" Moskvin replied.

"Don't talk like that; you're a member of the government too, you know. But let's be more concrete. You haven't come to see me just to pay a courtesy call. Am I right in thinking that you want something from me?"

"We have two questions. One is spiritual, the other material. Allow me to begin with the former?"

Moskvin invited Mikhail Kalinin to address Moscow art workers on the subject of the tasks of the Soviet intelligentsia, and immediately received his consent.

Kalinin smiled slily, peering through his glasses.

"We've solved the spiritual question easily enough, but the material one is a different matter. What do you want here?"

Moskvin explained that we could not open the Central Art Workers' Club because of a mere trifle: we were short of a kilometre of cable for the lighting.

"So a kilometre of cable is a trifle, is it? Far from it, my friend. As a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR you should know how scarce materials are with the present scale of building. Whom have you tried?"

"We asked the Moscow Soviet. They refused."

"Whom did you ask there?"

Mikhail Kalinin. Sketch made by L. Govorov at the Bolshoi Theatre branch

I gave the names of some officials.

"I don't see how I can help you then! They're all new names to me. Believe me, I just don't know them. I'll try, of course, but I can't promise anything."

"But they know you, Mikhail Ivanovich, and that's much more important!"

Three days later we got the cable. Unfortunately, it transpired later that the builders needed three times less cable than they had asked us for.

On January 9 at midnight, Kalinin addressed Moscow art workers on the need to master Marxist-Leninist theory and the method of socialist realism.

Two thousand actors, painters and musicians filled the building of the Bolshoi Theatre branch. The late hour had been chosen so that actors could attend after the theatre.

"In front of me are art workers, one of the most important and largest sections of the Soviet intelligentsia," said Kalinin. "The old intelligentsia regarded itself as the salt of the earth. The Soviet intelligentsia really is becoming the salt of the earth. It already occupies a position in our public life which no other intelligentsia has held in any capitalist state at any time in history."

Kalinin's speech was the first major political event in the life of the as yet officially unopened Central Art Workers' Club.

In May of the same year the official opening took place at No. 9, Pushechnaya Street.

"Good luck!" said Moskvin. "They say Lenin spoke in this building twice in 1920. Let this be an impetus to the ideological work of our club.

"In 1887 the young Stanislavsky acted here in an amateur production of Gogol's *Gamblers*, and shortly after the fire in the Hunters' Club the plays of the Society of Art and Literature produced by Stanislavsky were transferred here. It was here on February 8, 1891, that Tolstoy's *Fruits of Enlightenment* had its première.

"Let this be an earnest of success in our Club's struggle for culture and skill in the theatre! Good luck!"

After wishing us all success in our work Moskvin handed over the club presidency to Valeria Barsova.

He hever failed to help the club with advice and practical assistance afterwards.

"GRANDAD MISHA"

Mikhail Mikhailovich Tarkhanov, a man of incredible creative energy, was closely connected with the Masters of Arts' Club and subsequently with the Central Art Workers' Club, particularly in the latter years of his life. He frequently visited the club and never refused to take part in its various events as an actor and a teacher.

In his old age teaching played no less a part in Tarkhanov's life than acting. It was difficult to imagine him without the young people of whom he was so fond and to whom he devoted such attention.

In the Central Art Workers' Club Tarkhanov gave talks to young people and drama students about the art of acting and presided at discussions on training and educating actors.

Shortly before his death he took part in an anniversary cycle of Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko readings organised by the Central Club in connection with the 50th anniversary of the Moscow Art Theatre.

Tarkhanov often came to the club unexpectedly, without any particular business, just to have a chat. He would reminisce about interesting meetings and tell of his work at the Lunacharsky State Institute of Theatrical Art (GITIS).

One day in March 1948 Tarkhanov sat in my office and told a small group of actors about his past. He spoke about one of his teachers, Nikolai Nikolayevich Sinelnikov, the outstanding provincial producer who trained a galaxy of great Russian actors.

"What a fine teacher of the young he was and a splendid, erudite producer too. His activity is a glorious page in the history of the

Mikhail Tarkhanov

Russian theatre, a vivid, unforgettable page. He knew how to select fine actors, and after him doors were open to them everywhere. In his assessment of an actor's talent he was never wrong....

"One day he suggested that I should play Knurov in *The Dowerless Girl.*

"'Oh, no,' I said to him. 'It's not my cup of tea.'

"'So you don't trust my judgement, eh?'

"Then the 'conditioning' began. In the morning he invited me to his office and showed me drawings connected with the part of Knurov, sketches for the sets and make-up. A first-class tailor was present who was ordered to make the costumes of the best material. Well, I thought, if they've invited such a famous tailor that must mean I can do the role, it means they have confidence in me. I began to search for something in myself, and went to Sinelnikov each day from eight to nine in the evening. That was set aside in his time-table—this hour for Tarkhanov. And he packed so much into it. He used to work with actors so that they went away as if they were under a spell. But the most important thing was that he loved actors.

"In one play I was acting a trifling, small part. But how he thanked me for it! Actually I had wanted to show that one can always do something with a small role. It's an old truth that there are no small parts, only small actors.

"In Kiev I worked under Sinelnikov with that fine actor Stepan Kuznetsov. Sinelnikov often tried to bring us together in plays. It was always a great pleasure for me to act with him. You know what it means when an actor gets on with his partner. Only then does the dialogue become interesting. Nikolai Radin was an unsurpassed master of dialogue!

"During a matinée performance Sinelnikov called me into his office in the interval and asked:

"'Well, how do you like my work?'

"'Very much, Nikolai Nikolayevich.'

"'Good! And I like you too. So let's sign a contract for three years.'

"This was an unheard-of offer in those days. Contracts were usually signed only for a season.

"After I left his office I met Stepan Kuznetsov. This splendid actor received a similar offer. Sinelnikov said the offer was valid until five o'clock that evening.

"We hastily signed the contract and only later that day discovered why he had been in such a hurry.

"The evening performance of *Heroes of the 20th Century* (a play by Ryzhkov) was attended by another major impresario, Duvan-Tortsov. It transpired that he had come to Kiev to invite me and Stepan Kuznetsov to join his theatre.

"I worked with Sinelnikov in Kharkov too. When the season was about to begin, the famous dramatic actress Polevitskaya, a favourite of the Kharkovians, was prevented from arriving by illness. The role was hastily handed over to Baranovskaya. Sinelnikov was most concerned that she should pass the test and rehearsed with her personally, encouraging her like a father after the dress rehearsal.

"But then the day of the performance arrives. The first act was over. Baranovskaya was acting poorly. There was panic. We felt it would be a complete flop. In the interval Sinelnikov rushed to her dressing room, went down on his knees and exclaimed delightedly:

"'You simply can't imagine what an actress you are!'

"He kissed her hands with tears in his eyes. After this she acted with such spirit that the audience gave her an ovation. And he had put it all on! He used to say: 'Actors are children. You can do

Nikolai Sinelnikov

anything with them if you're affectionate.' But he always added: 'Not just children, but children-of-a-bitch!' What a subtle old man he was!"

Tarkhanov and I reminisced about 1934. On the initiative of Sinelnikov's former pupils the Masters of Arts' Club decided to celebrate a rare anniversary—the sixtieth anniversary of his career on the stage. Sinelnikov had not given up, but was continuing his work in the Kharkov Russian Drama Theatre. We invited him to Moscow and celebrated the anniversary of this veteran of the Russian theatre with his favourite actors. It was a moving meeting of the teacher and his pupils who had become popular actors in Moscow theatres.

The small, thin, sharp-nosed old man was greatly touched by the attention of his former students. Listening to their affectionate, warm greetings, and sitting at the concert organised in his honour, Sinelnikov kept fidgeting in his seat, blowing his nose and wiping his eyes with his handkerchief.

Six months later his memoirs were published in Kharkov. He had

managed to include his impressions of this anniversary meeting. Shortly afterwards I received a copy of the book with the following inscription: "From N. N. Sinelnikov, who is sincerely grateful for the initiative, trouble and work in organising my anniversary evening! I shall remember this evening for the rest of my life!"

In his reminiscences about the pre-revolutionary theatre in the provinces, Tarkhanov spoke of well-known actors who used to travel back and forth over the immense expanses of Russia.

There was a special type of itinerant actor in those days. They usually performed in hastily got-together troupes, visiting the most remote areas. In spite of the mediocrity of the entourage these itinerant actors were a great success wherever they went. For all the defects of the theatre system of that day, they were performing each in his own way the noble duty of disseminating the classics.

They were predominantly tragedians. Some of them like Pavel Orlenev and Mamont Dalsky, for example, belonged to the bohemian set. In complete contrast to them were the famous Adelgeim brothers who served Melpomene devotedly and remained true to the ascetic way of life to the end of their days.

Many actors of the older generation came to love the theatre and act on the stage because they were captivated by the acting of these "high priests of the art".

I was fortunate enough to see the whole of this great galaxy on the stage and witness their success with the public, particularly with students. This was at low-priced performances in the Petrograd People's House, during the First World War.

I particularly remember Mamont Dalsky in the role of Kean in Dumas' play of the same name.

The culmination of the play is the scene in which Kean recites Hamlet's monologue. The actor playing this role is faced with the complex task of handling this scene in such a way that the audience believes in Kean's acting prowess, in his ability to embody adequately the greatest of Shakespeare's characters.

Mamont Dalsky coped with the task brilliantly. In spite of his corpulence and advanced years he moved about the stage with extraordinary ease, was a master of mime and gesture, wore his costume with unusual freedom, making the most of its every detail. The way he played with his cloak was extremely effective in Hamlet's monologue.

The transformation of Dalsky into Kean and Dalsky's Kean into Hamlet was remarkable. His performance of the role of the Danish prince in Dumas' play was quite different from his treatment of the same role when he acted it in Shakespeare's tragedy. When the performance was over and the applause had died down I rushed backstage in the hope of getting the famous actor's autograph.

The door to his dressing room was open. Dalsky was sitting by a mirror taking off his make-up. On a small table was a bottle of "eau-de-vivre" and several glasses. Two elegantly dressed gentlemen were sitting in armchairs smoking and watching the dissipated Kean turn into the disorganised Dalsky.

"Oh, this is the last straw," grumbled Dalsky as he saw the photograph of himself which I handed to him. But I was so small, timid and overwhelmed by his greatness, that he took the proffered photograph. "I suppose you want to be an actor, eh? Footlights? Flowers? Applause? Fame? Is that what you want, young lad? But you don't want to study, do you? How old are you, kind sir? Twelve, I should say?"

"Fifteen," I whispered, almost dying of embarrassment, but adding another year to my fourteen.

This conversation took place in May 1917. Petrograd was seething with mass meetings.

"You are well-preserved, I must say!" Dalsky remarked caustically. "And what party do you belong to? Now is the time to take up politics, not the theatre!"

I was ready to fall through the floor, particularly as Dalsky's friends were egging him on.

"Alright, lad. I was only joking. You must love the theatre! The revolution needs the theatre!" He dipped the pen into the inkwell and roared like a wounded lion. "Damn them! This pen's only good for signing a manifesto on the tsar's abdication!"

Dalsky asked my name and scratched an inscription on the photograph. Shortly afterwards I learned that he had joined the anarchist party and left the stage. In 1918 he had a fatal accident in Moscow: he rode his bicycle under a tram in Nikitskaya Street.

When I related this curious episode from my childhood to Tarkhanov, who had worked with Dalsky when the latter was in his prime, Tarkhanov said animatedly:

"Dalsky was always an actor of great stage technique and expression. He was one of Chaliapin's teachers and had a perfect command of the whole range of feelings and transitions from one stage of emotion to another. And how plastic he was on the stage!

Mamont Dalsky. Portrait with an inscription to Boris Filippov

What vocal timbre! Yet in real life he was a typical representative of the pre-revolutionary stage bohemians. He liked the good life.... Always the best room in the hotel, even in pinched circumstances.

"I joined his troupe when I was still young. Right from the start he used to poke fun at me. In *Hamlet* I played Horatio with him, and backstage he would call out: 'Where's my Gerasim?' And he gave very amusing, spiteful imitations of me. An intolerable situation arose, and I decided to have it out with him. I went to his hotel one morning, but his manservant would not let me see him.

"'Well I never, lad. Do you think Mamont Victorovich will see you at this early hour? The master was drinking till dawn.'

"However I was firmly resolved to wait until Dalsky woke up. Evidently the altercation at the door had been heard inside. A hoarse voice summoned the servant, and a minute later I was allowed in to see Dalsky. He received me in bed. With great inner trepidation, but quite firmly, I explained my grievance to him.

"'Either let me go, Mamont Victorovich, or stop poking fun at me. If I make mistakes, teach me to put them right!'

Nikolai Radin

"Dalsky pondered awhile and then said:

"'Why didn't you ask me to help you before? Come here in the mornings and rehearse.'"

After that Gerasim was replaced by Horatio. But nevertheless Dalsky remained true to form. One day during a performance Horatio was again deposed and crushed. He accidentally stepped on Hamlet's robe at the moment when the latter said: "Swear!" The cloak fell from Hamlet's shoulders and some vulgar abuse rang out for all to hear.

Tarkhanov could stand it no longer. He walked off the stage, removed his make-up and never acted with Dalsky again. Yet he always ranked him among the best teachers.

Recalling the finest actors of his generation, Tarkhanov spoke with great admiration of Nikolai Radin:

"He was everyone's idol! A brilliant actor for the theatre. No matter what he appeared in, there was always a full house. Who else could this incident happen to? One day a group of well-dressed

people came up to him on the day of his benefit performance and presented him with a gold watch: 'Accept this from your admirers, Nikolai Mariusovich! We've been living off you for the whole season!' It turned out that they were speculators. They bought up tickets for Radin's performances and sold them for three times the original price."

Tarkhanov also explained how it was that he acquired his stage name—how Mikhail Moskvin turned into Mikhail Tarkhanov.

"In my youth I was mad about the theatre, especially the Maly. I saw ten performances of *Wolves and Sheep* there in three years. This play became so engrained in my memory that if I were asked to put it on with the same mises-en-scène, I could reproduce them exactly.

"I was never trained at drama school. I began work at the Ryazan theatre in walk-on roles. The Ryazan season would have been quite uneventful for me were it not for one important circumstance: as you know, on October 14, 1898, the Moscow Art Theatre opened with the play *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich.* And the following day a totally unknown young actor by the name of Moskvin woke up a celebrity. It was Ivan Moskvin.

"The same day in Ryazan there was a performance of a play in which another Moskvin—Mikhail—was playing four servants in the four acts. In the first act I was an old valet with long sidewhiskers, in the next a younger valet, in the third act a very young valet, and in the fourth a waiter with a Tatar accent in a restaurant."

Alas, no fame awaited Mikhail Moskvin in Ryazan. But everyone started pestering him with questions about his brother. At first he avoided replying. He thought that he would disgrace his brother, who was now the pride of the Art Theatre, by playing nothing but servants.... And so he decided to stop being Moskvin and find a new surname. His new impresario, the boss of the Kaluga theatre, said he would help him find a pseudonym. When Moskvin arrived in Kaluga and read the names of the troupe on a poster he did not know which name was meant to be his. It was only when he went to see the impresario that he found out.

"Hello, Mikhail Tarkhanov!" the impresario greeted him. "I have christened you thus in honour of my old friend, the famous Caucasian hunter Tarkhanov."

The artist's future held in store for him fame and popularity as a master of the Soviet theatre. Everyone who knew Tarkhanov was impressed by his tireless activity and inexhaustible energy, his inner youthfulness. This great actor who had played more than

Mikhail Tarkhanov with his son

eight hundred roles tried to record the creative results of his many years in the theatre, and to hand on his rich experience to young actors.

He described with particular enthusiasm his new work in the State Institute of Theatrical Art on a production of *Wit Works Woe* in which his pupils, Chuvash students, were taking part.

"I'll show you a Chatsky you won't find in any other Moscow theatre," he said enthusiastically. "Things aren't so good at the moment with producers. There is a small group of established producers in the country, but no up-and-coming ones yet."

The problem of young producers concerned Tarkhanov just as much as the education of young actors and the improvement of actors' skills.

During this period he was particularly active in meeting young people and talking about an actor's work on himself. At this time too he was filmed in *An Actor's Skill* which recorded all the best characters created by him in the theatre.

He sat for almost two months for the artist Laktionov who was painting his portrait in the Central Art Workers' Club.

He also found time to sit for another artist, the cartoonist Igin, in my office. When Igin had finished his not altogether flattering cartoon, Tarkhanov exploded:

"Well, my friend, I can't say.... That's not me, it's Moskvin! Give it to him."

In the autumn of 1947 Tarkhanov had his seventieth birthday. He gladly accepted the invitation to celebrate it at the Central Art Workers' Club. He saw this as a kind of resumé of his creative and public activity.

On October 8, 1947, at 11 p.m. the Moscow theatre world gathered at the Central Club.

One after another the numerous representatives of Moscow theatres and public organisations gave speeches of greeting.

On behalf of the Moscow Art Theatre Tarkhanov was greeted by the "three sisters"—the actresses Alla Tarasova, Klavdia Yelanskaya and Angelina Stepanova.

Artists from the Central Children's Theatre congratulated "Grandad Misha" with a poem by their writer Sergei Mikhalkov which was performed by actresses playing children's parts:

Grandfather Misha, congratulations!
Today you are seventy—rather ancient!
We wish you all happiness, health and good cheer;
As the Theatre's children, we greet you here.

The Gypsy Theatre troupe turned up in full force to pay their respects with a song which they accompanied with some breath-taking dancing.

Not only the whole of the Moscow theatre world was present at this anniversary. There were also representatives of the Soviet Army and Moscow factories, including the motor works where Tarkhanov ran an amateur dramatic society for three years. Everyone wanted to express his affection for this outstanding actor and citizen.

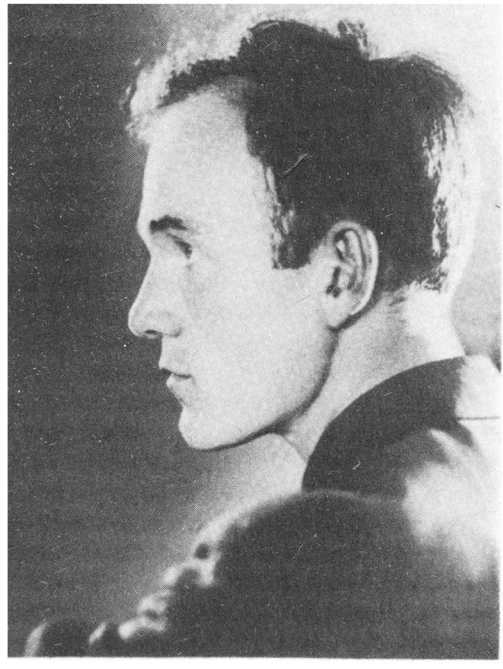
A DAUGHTER OF THE MALY THEATRE

It was a truly unforgettable concert. In the autumn of 1949 one of the greatest pianists of our day, Svyatoslav Richter, gave a recital at the Central Art Workers' Club. In the front row of the stalls, hypnotised by Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody, sat those venerable old ladies of the Russian arts world — Alexandra Yablochkina, Antonina Nezhdanova, Olga Knipper-Chekhova and Yelena Gnesina. They listened motionless, enthralled by Svyatoslav Richter's magic, his stirring performance, the power of his skill and technique. Their presence in the hall did not pass unnoticed by the pianist, either. It added a special zest to his playing on that memorable evening.

At that time Richter was little known abroad. Even at home this most talented pupil of the outstanding pianist and teacher Heinrich Neuhaus had not yet achieved universal recognition.

This concert, which greatly moved the artistic audience of the Central Club, might be described with the words of the great Russian critic V. Stasov, who was writing about Liszt's visit to St. Petersburg in 1842: "Nothing like it has ever been heard in our time, and in general we have never met such a brilliant, passionate, demonic nature, which rages like a hurricane or flows in streams of gentle beauty and grace...."

After Richter's triumphal concert the actress Yablochkina went backstage accompanied by her friends and had a long talk with the pianist, predicting that he would become a world celebrity.



Svyatoslav Richter

"I was quite overwhelmed by your remarkable playing. Don't be surprised, my dear, but I was a contemporary of Liszt's. I was already twenty when he died. In my long life I have heard many great pianists of the past, including Rachmaninov himself ... and Hofmann. You, my dear, are the wonder of our time. And quite unlike anyone else! It was Gorodinsky, I think, who wrote that you have no need to don other people's garb. How right he is!"

Richter was embarrassed and obviously deeply moved by her praise, which was warmly echoed by Nezhdanova and Gnesina who had also come to congratulate him.

Then the talk assumed a general character, and Yablochkina revealed remarkable knowledge of music.

"How do you know all this?" Gnesina asked her in surprise.

"Oh, I have music in my blood. After all my great-great-grandfather was senior musician in the Household Regiment of the Empress Yelizaveta. My great-grandfather was a violinist by profession and conductor at the court of Catherine II, and my grandfather was a conductor with the ballet. How can I help loving music?"

To the very end of her life Yablochkina followed all the major events in music, painting and the cinema, but her main interest, of course, was the Soviet theatre.

In the history of the Russian theatre Yablochkina holds a special place, not only as a highly talented actress who nearly reached her hundredth birthday and devoted seventy-five years of her life to the service of the Maly, one of the oldest Russian theatres.

The name of Yablochkina, that fine successor to a whole artistic dynasty, is associated with unshakeable honesty, integrity, high principles, and civic spirit, in the highest meaning of the word.

In the Maly she gained the reputation of being the "actor's conscience". She opposed the slightest injustice uncompromisingly, and actors who had been treated unfairly often saught her support.

Throughout her life Yablochkina retained a remarkable purity, together with an attractive naivete at times, which explains the many anecdotes linked with her name.

The elderly Yablochkina once had her flat burgled. It was said that she remained calm and even lectured the burglars, explaining to them that she was a *People's Artist* and the government would be "particularly displeased" that she had been robbed. True, this argument did not "impress" the burglars and they stole several articles from her apartment. Yet it need hardly be said that this "discussion" with them entailed considerable risk for the actress.

Yablochkina's acting, the development of her skill, was greatly influenced by that outstanding producer at the Maly Theatre Alexander Lensky and the mentor of her early years Glikeria Fedotova, a well-known actress who assumed the role of guardian to the young debutante when she took up the theatre.

Alexandra Yablochkina learnt a great deal from her father, a producer who was greatly respected by Nemirovich-Danchenko.

To the very end of her life she retained an ardent reverence for the theatre and the overwhelming desire to act on the stage. Lensky once joked that to satisfy her creative "greed" she would have to be allowed to play Sophia, Liza, Chatsky and Famusov in *Wit Works Woe*.

This joke was just as apt at the end of the brilliant actress's life as well. She played an enormous repertoire on the stage of the Maly. In *Wit Works Woe*, for example, she acted successively Sophia, Natalia Dmitrievna, and Khlestova.

In March 1947 Yablochkina presided at the Central Club at a meeting devoted to "Old Theatrical Moscow" in connection with the celebration of the capital's 800th anniversary.

Alexandra Yablochkina

She joked that she owed the honour of being invited to chair the meeting only to the fact that she was "personally acquainted" with the founder of Moscow, Yuri Dolgoruky.

The Maly Theatre celebrated its 140th anniversary and speakers naturally touched not only on its past but also on its present, its leading lights, beginning with the founder of the realist school in the Russian theatre, Mikhail Shchepkin. Much attention was devoted to the great Russian actress Yermolova. And many warm words were said about Yablochkina as the loyal bearer of the traditions of Shchepkin and Ostrovsky.

Even in pre-revolutionary times the Maly Theatre was called Moscow's second university. It was also said that whereas young people *learnt* things at university, they *received an education* at the Maly.

In her reminiscences the actress told us how she had acted with the Italian tragedian Tommaso Salvini, that colossus of dramatic art,

who fought for the national liberation of Italy and was an associate of Garibaldi's. At the end of the last century he gave guest performances in Moscow. He played Othello at the Maly and expressed the desire to have Yablochkina in the role of Desdemona. Iago was played by Yuzhin. Although Salvini spoke his role in Italian this did not disturb the harmony of the performance.

In a talk with Yablochkina, Adelaida Dzhuri, a former well-known dancer at the Bolshoi who had been present at the evening in the Central Club, described how she had visited Tommaso Salvini in 1912 while staying in Florence where he had his permanent residence. In Moscow the great actor had invited her and her husband to his villa in Trespiano. It was a comfortable house surrounded with flower gardens. They were admitted unannounced. From the hall they entered a room where the maestro himself was sitting at a small desk. Seeing the guests he rose to his great height and greeted them. By the wall in the small study was a glass case containing an Othello costume, and next to it—a portrait of the actor in this role.

"I asked Salvini why he preferred Oriental costume to Venetian for Othello. He replied that Oriental dress was more picturesque and theatrical. When Salvini began to speak with his typical Italian verve the room seemed too small to accommodate the sound of his voice. The timbre reminded one of an organ. Tommaso invited us to take breakfast with him and reminisced warmly about his guest tours in Moscow. He spoke a great deal about you, Alexandra Alexandrovna, and said he had never seen such a remarkable Desdemona on any other European stage."

In October 1953 the Central Art Workers' Club began a large series of concerts by People's Artists of the Soviet Union.

It was only natural that the honour of opening the series should fall to that doyen of the Soviet stage, Yablochkina.

I remember how she prepared for the concert, with what care she rehearsed scenes which she had acted many a time from Ostrovsky's comedy *Wolves and Sheep* and Tolstoy's *The Living Corpse*.

Her partners in the concert were the Maly Theatre artists V. Vladislavsky, Y. Velikhov, I. Komissarov and Y. Solodova, and an introductory speech about the actress's work was given by K. Zubov who was at that time chief producer at the Maly.

We printed a concert programme with a short biographical note on Yablochkina's life and work, and sent the draft text for her information and corrections. It included a list of the many roles she had played—from Ophelia to Gurmyzhskaya.

There is a letter from her in which she wrote to me: "I do not think it is necessary to list everything, but if you are going to mention the roles all the same, I should like you to add that I began acting Shakespeare at the Maly with the role of Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* and that I have played three roles in Ostrovsky's comedy *Even the Wise Can Err*—Mashenka, Mamayeva and Turusina."

Alongside her roles in the classical repertoire Yablochkina created some vivid characters in plays by Soviet dramatists: Gornostayeva (*Lyubov Yarovaya* by Konstantin Trenyov), Skutarevskaya (*Skutarevsky* by Leonid Leonov) and Xenia Dubrovskaya (*The Fiery Bridge* by Boris Romashov).

In April 1948 the Central Art Workers' Club celebrated the 125th anniversary of the birth of Alexander Ostrovsky. I met Yablochkina at the entrance and accompanied her backstage. Passing through the foyer we stopped to look at an exhibition of the work of the great Russian dramatist and productions of his plays in various theatres throughout the country. I drew her attention to photographs of her in numerous roles. The photographic display seemed to reflect the actress's whole life from the early years of her stage career. Yablochkina's face lit up and she smiled. After her performance she came to my office and described how she had seen Ostrovsky twice. The first time as a twelve-year-old schoolgirl when he was invited to St. Petersburg to the school which she attended. The well-known translator of Shakespeare, P. Weinberg, organised literary matinées for the pupils at which many writers appeared, including Goncharov. At one of these matinées Ostrovsky recited excerpts from his works—with great artistry, vividness and clarity.

The second meeting took place at a school concert when Yablochkina was already seventeen. She acted scenes from *The Thunderstorm* as Katerina and *Wit Works Woe* as Sophia.

"I was as slender as could be—with a willowy waist. Katerina was not right for me. Ostrovsky said so! But he liked me in *Wit Works Woe.* He said he would take me as one of his pupils, but this was not destined to be. He died in the same year. When I was asked later whether I would go on to study or simply start acting I said I could not imagine a teacher other than Ostrovsky, and decided to go straight onto the stage. So you see—sixty-two years without a breather! And I have been president of the All-Russia Theatrical Society since 1915, which takes up quite a lot of energy.

"All my long life," Yablochkina continued, "I have worked ceaselessly, mindful of the behests of Shchepkin and Ostrovsky. Do you recall Negina's words from *Talents and Admirers*: "I am an

actress.... The stage is the only place for me. How can I live without the theatre!"

When the film *A Daughter of the Maly Theatre* was released, we decided to invite its heroine, Yablochkina, to the première at the Central Club. On the day of the showing, however, the actress was unwell. With her customary courtesy, she sent a letter to say that the "Daughter of the Maly Theatre" was unfortunately not feeling well and was not in a condition to tackle the stairs at the Central Club into the hall. On this occasion she requested us to confine ourselves to a speech by the film director. She herself would be present only on the screen.

I was fortunate in meeting Yablochkina frequently in the Maly Theatre, the Actors' Club, and at our Central Art Workers' Club, to which she was elected an honorary member.

In 1955 the latter celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. Yablochkina came to Pushechnaya Street in person to congratulate the officers of the Central Club and its members. It was a freezing cold day in February. She was accompanied by two unknown old ladies who "unpacked" her slowly and reverently, not allowing anyone else to take off her fur coat and warm winter overshoes.

All the officers and members were assembled in the Small Hall. Yablochkina delivered a short speech of welcome, but directed it absent-mindedly at a group of cloakroom attendants standing respectfully at a distance, instead of the members of the board. She shook their hands and congratulated them on the success of the work. Perhaps this was not entirely unintentional; after all, Stanislavsky said that "the theatre begins with the cloakroom".

In 1959 Yablochkina took part in a concert entitled "Masters of Art to the Builders of Communism", organised jointly by the Central Club and Moscow Television. She appeared with Mikhail Tsarvov in a scene from Alexander Korneichuk's play *Wings*, as Goritsvet, the old schoolteacher. She acted the part with great sincerity.

At this time, in spite of her advanced years, the actress continued to appear on the stage of the Maly and acted in a production of *Vanity Fair*.

She arrived in good time for the concert at the Central Club. Her performance was remarkably vivid and full of humour. The audience gave her a standing ovation. Yablochkina was thanked by Valeria Barsova, President of the Central Club, who presented her with flowers and gave her a reverent bow.

Afterwards Yablochkina took a rest in my office, pleased with her success and the applause of the audience.

"You haven't seen me in *Vanity Fair*? But you must come. It's my première. I was so nervous as I went onto the stage. But the public gave me a marvellous reception. Laughter, applause, they simply wouldn't let me act. Come on the 25th of January, not the 23rd. Dunya Turchaninova is playing on the 23rd. And beginning on January 27, I have got concert performances three days running at the Kremlin Theatre."

We listened to all this in amazement. Not bad for ninety-two, was it!

The government appreciated the work of this fine Russian actress by awarding her, in addition to an honorary title, state prizes, three Orders of Lenin, two Orders of the Red Banner of Labour and a number of medals.

In 1964 Yablochkina was no more.... She departed from us, that splendid actress and public figure, who had bestowed concern on many a generation of Russian actors.

The Central Actors' Club rightly bears the name of Alexandra Yablochkina—a truly people's artist of the Soviet Union. The best memorial to her public activity is the new, comfortable House for Retired Stage Veterans, opened in a stretch of forest in Moscow's Izmailovo district on her initiative. This house provides elderly people who have retired from the theatre with separate, well-furnished rooms, food and medical care.

It can confidently be said that nowhere are theatre workers better cared for than in the Soviet Union. A considerable amount of the credit for this goes to that fine actress the centenary of whose birth has been widely celebrated in our country.

AN ACTOR'S WORK

There is a television film entitled *Irakly Andronikov Relates*. It records the turbulent talent of this remarkable writer, actor, literary critic and creator of a new variety genre. As he performs, the living likenesses of Alexei Tolstoy, Kachalov and Ostuzhev appear before us.... It is so good that future generations will be able to see one of his masterpieces—a delightful oral story about Ostuzhev which the author calls "Chaliapin's Throat".

The film's première took place in the Central Writers' Club. Andronikov came to see me the day before with the makers of the film. In connection with the film we began to reminisce about Ostuzhev. The actor's real surname had been Pozharov (*pozhar* means fire in Russian). In changing his fiery name for the exact opposite (the name Ostuzhev is derived from the word *stuzha* which means cold or frost) he was following the advice of his friends.

"Just imagine what would happen if the audience suddenly started calling out your name. Everyone would think the theatre was on fire!"

"Do you know how my story began?" asked Andronikov. "At first there was no subject at all. Once Ostuzhev mentioned in a conversation that Chaliapin had shown him his throat. After that Ostuzhev looked down his gullet in the mirror, spread out his hands in chagrin, and announced sadly: 'A tiny hole.'

"And the rest it took me two weeks of careful questioning to get out of him," Andronikov continued. "Every day the story was

Alexander Ostuzhev

embroidered with new details. But the remarkable thing is that Ostuzhev on the stage was a man with a tragic, romantic air, the noble embodiment of the characters of Shakespeare and Schiller, whereas in real life he could not have been more prosaic.

"When we both happened to be patients in the Botkin Hospital he used to spend hours in my ward until someone suggested:

"'Perhaps you would like to move in with Andronikov?'

"The old man declared indignantly that he could not stand sharing a room. If anyone was even breathing near him he could not get to sleep. When it was pointed out to him that he spent whole days sitting next to me and putting up with my breathing he paused for a moment....

"'Oh, I hadn't thought of that!' he said. He moved into my ward and slept like a log!"

Andronikov punctuated his account of this episode with his infectious, booming laugh. I noticed that he was almost always the first to react to his own stories in a circle of friends when he was improvising a new dialogue, imitating the various characters. His laughter, typical of the volcanic nature of the story-teller himself, seemed capable of producing an earthquake.

This evening, as we were reminiscing about Ostuzhev, we came to the conclusion that he was a miracle, not a man. Those who accompanied him on his last earthly journey, on a bitter February day in 1953, will not forget the sad farewell ceremony in the Maly Theatre and Yablochkina's heartfelt, moving speech. She addressed Ostuzhev as if he were still alive:

"Dear Alexander! Last summer we rested together in the sanatorium, and you made me promise not to die before you. I have kept my word! Goodbye, dear friend!"

Yes, he was a remarkable person, who performed a great artistic feat.

How a person must love the theatre and what will-power he must have to master the profession of an actor in spite of physical handicaps which would seem to rule out the stage.

Yet ten years after Ostuzhev joined the Maly he lost his hearing as a result of a severe illness. "I went on and could not hear the prompter," he said, "it was like being in a soundless desert.... How can you go onto the stage when you know you are helpless? You are terrified that you will suddenly forget something—and nobody will be able to help you out there, on the stage!"

Ostuzhev overcame his defect. No, he did not regain his hearing, but he remained on the beloved stage of the Maly Theatre for many

a long year, putting twice as much energy and effort into the preparation of his roles as his colleagues.

He learnt by heart not only his own roles but also those of all the other characters so as to catch their replies and carry on a stage dialogue with them. And to calm his nerves he learnt carpentry and engaged in this physical occupation in his spare time. One of the pieces of furniture in his room was a joiner's bench. They say he was also remarkably strong. He could break a horse-shoe with his bare hands and bend a five-kopeck coin with his fingers.

Ostuzhev's whole life was the tremendous, devoted labour of an artist whom "Apollo had summoned to a sacred sacrifice" in the true sense of the word and who could not imagine life outside the theatre. Here is the result, a list of the most important characters created by him: Oswald in *Ghosts* by Ibsen, Mortimer in *Maria Stuart* and Karl Moor in *Die Räuber* by Schiller, Shakespeare's Othello, Gogol's Khlestakov and, finally, Uriel Acosta in Gutzkow's tragedy of the same name.

Illarion Pevtsov, an actor at the Pushkin Academic Drama Theatre (the former Alexandrinsky Theatre) in Leningrad, also belonged to the same category of artists. He had stuttered since childhood but found the strength to overcome this serious defect and become a brilliant dramatic actor.

Yet when he was attending the Vilno secondary school he could not reply orally to the teachers and used to give them written answers instead.

Apart from Pevtsov, I knew only one other actor who was also passionately devoted to the theatre and suffered from the same defect. It was the well-known tragedian Rossov, a "sublime creature, not of this world", who was not without peculiarities and who lost his bearings during the revolution. He was unable to grasp the events taking place around him, and recognised only the classical repertoire.

Nothing that is weaker than Hamlet and Othello in terms of human passion was for Rossov. I do not know how he managed to overcome his speech defect. Without realising it he probably chose the same way as Pevtsov to achieve free mastery of stage speech.

In his attempts to analyse the process of unfettering his speech Pevtsov came close in many respects to Pavlov's theory of conditioned reflexes.

This is how he described the way he attained spiritual calm on the stage, which freed his psyche from the action of pathological

Alexander Ostuzhev as Othello

reflexes: "Many functions of our physical and psychic life take place unconsciously (that is, automatically) which is why they do not cause difficulties: we walk, swallow water and accompany our words with gestures unconsciously, spontaneously, as it were. In the same way we express our thoughts in words. If any of these acts becomes deliberate, conscious, this immediately gives rise to a certain degree of difficulty."

As a result the actor concluded that a decisive role in freeing him from his speech defect while he was acting on the stage was played by his creative imagination and the art of transformation. As he walked onto the stage he no longer felt himself to be Pevtsov with a stutter, but the character whom he was performing. It was this that gave him the sense of spiritual calm.

I saw Pevtsov for the first time as an actor in Leningrad in 1925. He had joined the former Alexandrinsky Theatre on the invitation of Yuryev who at that time was not only an actor but also the theatre's artistic director.

Pevtsov had already acquired a considerable amount of acting

experience and fame, which he had won mainly by his performance of Paul I in Merezhkovsky's play of the same name in Moscow and other Russian towns.

Pevtsov was undoubtedly a highly gifted actor who excelled in roles which demanded profound psychoanalysis from the performer. It was no accident that he made his debut on the stage of the Leningrad theatre in the role of Fedya Protasov in Tolstoy's *The Living Corpse*, and was later most successful as Professor Borodin in Afinogenov's play *Fear*, in the "duet", or, rather "duel", with his delightful partner Yekaterina Korchagina-Alexandrovskaya, the popular Leningrad actress who played the veteran Communist in this play.

In the 1930s Illarion Pevtsov and "Aunty Katya", as the Leningraders affectionately called Korchagina-Alexandrovskaya, frequently travelled to Moscow to give concerts at the Masters of Arts' Club.

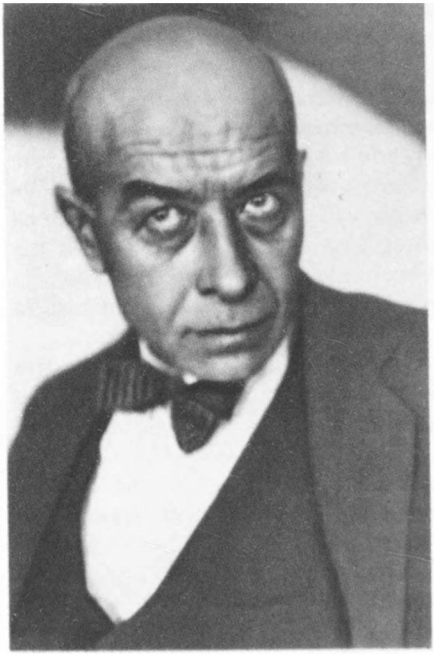
By no means all the well-known, celebrated actors whom I knew possessed the ability to generalise their creative experience, but Pevtsov belonged to the category of thinking actors who pondered the problems of their profession and tried to provide a theoretical basis for many tenets which had been discovered intuitively or as a result of self-observation. Of considerable importance for Pevtsov's creative development was his contact with such intellectual producers as Meyerhold and Nemirovich-Danchenko. He frequently stressed his affinity with Stanislavsky's system.

In his talks at the Masters of Arts' Club with young people he did not make any special discoveries, but the ideas expressed by him and his descriptions of his methods of working aroused considerable interest among young artists and drama students. I think Pevtsov's statements on the actor's "craft" are of more than a narrowly professional interest. Here is a record of one of these talks, which throws light on the actor's methodology and shows how true art demands very hard work:

"The theme of creativity, of the actor's creative method," said Pevtsov, "is an inexhaustible one. Therefore I would ask you in advance to forgive me if what I am going to say proves to be only isolated, fragmentary reflections on my profession.

"Let me begin with a concrete fact. I receive a play which contains a role for me.

"In the old days actors often contented themselves with reading their own role only, copied out from the play. But in order to understand your role it is essential to make a profound study of the



Illarion Pevtsov

dramatic work as a whole and to work on a mass of supplementary material.

"Imagine the beginning of any performance which is the embodiment of a dramatic work on the stage. The curtain rises and reveals a group of people of a certain social standing, in a certain period, in certain relationships with one another, their encounters, conflicts, and inner aspirations.

"I ask myself why the author of the play has brought these people together. What is the play's main idea? What is the link between the individual actions of the characters and the play's main idea, and to what extent is this idea attune to people's vital interests, the high ideals for which progressive mankind is striving?

"From the individual actions of the personages, their behaviour, encounters and struggles one forms an idea of their characters, their philosophy of life. The author of the play compels his characters to deliver a certain text. And I, as the actor, must work upon myself in such a way that it becomes an inner necessity for me to utter these particular words.

"How can one find a way of uttering them so that they do not sound *learnt*, but really become one's *own* words? One must think hard about what made these people say these particular words. I begin to wonder what he (the person I am acting) is like, not only at the point at which we find him in the play, but what he did yesterday, the day before yesterday, and many years ago, what he liked, what his views on life were, what his whole background was.

"Giving free rein to one's imagination in this respect does not usually produce any results. I have become convinced that one must base one's search on logical evidence scattered about in the play which indicates why a certain character is now talking and acting in a certain way. One of the other characters may mention what sort of a family he comes from, who his father was, or recall some detail of his biography, some fact which throws light on his nature.

"I begin to make a careful study of the play and reflect upon everything that is said about the character in question. How could he become like he is? Perhaps because he was too trusting and someone deceived him? Perhaps he was corrupted by his environment? Or some heroic deed by him is dictated by high-minded, ideological motives based on true devotion to his people? The important thing is the initial birth of the text out of oneself. This is vital for everything. If a musician sits down to play a Chopin nocturne he must try as far as possible to attain the state of the composer when the latter was writing the work.

"In the same way the actor too must become the *creator* of a text which he has learnt by heart. The text of the role must sound as if *it is being born for the first time in him* from his encounter with the other people in the play.

"Hence we can make the first conclusion, the basic and main one, that the people whom the rising curtain reveals on the stage should have been carefully studied by the actor over the whole period of their lives, not only in their present, but in their past, on the basis of information supplied in the text of the play.

"The actor's work must be absolutely linked with the work of the author. This means the actor must pay close attention to each word of the text. True, professional experience and second-rate drama occasionally make us deviate from this rule. There are cases when the actor and producer are forced to take a pencil and make some vital corrections, shortening excessively long passages, re-arranging, and sometimes even inserting words or phrases into a role. For the actor there is no greater professional pleasure than the feeling that nothing need be changed in a play and a role, and from the very

beginning of his work on the character he trusts the author of the play and accepts his work entirely.

"But there is also the type of author who makes the actor think whether his plays are not beyond the actor's ken.

"I worked on Shakespeare's Othello and gave up the part after a few performances for a long time, perhaps forever, because it was an unsuccessful experiment for me. My mistake was that I departed from realism in my treatment of the Venetian Moor. I thought that because Othello expressed himself in the beautiful, elegant imagery of Shakespeare he was a poet himself, equal to the great Shakespeare. I thought this must be depicted as one of Othello's features—and this is where I went wrong.

"What is an actor's work in the narrow technical sense? Is there a choice in systems? This is so subjective, that I cannot deduce any rule or law from it. A great deal is written about this not by actors but by theatre critics. Their thoughts skate round the question. Actors, however, are more or less in agreement with one another in the main, but rarely talk about it, not only because they do not possess sufficient literary culture and cannot write, but because their professional practice introduces them to such vast layers and expanses in this sphere that they cannot embrace and analyse everything. Moreover we are dealing with areas of the human psyche which have not yet been fully studied. But it must be assumed that with the overall growth of human knowledge we will be able to find means of controlling our psychic apparatus accurately.

"We are undoubtedly moving in this direction. And today my training consists in stabilising various psychic reflexes.

"Let me take an example from early childhood. When I was five or six, there was a nice old woman who used to gather us children around her and sing a little song:

Far across the river
There you can sometimes hear
Cuck-oo, cuck-oo!

"It was so sad that we all used to cry. We were very fond of this song, and later, when we got together and sang it, we cried again. Just imagine, the song still brings tears to my eyes. Evidently this is because the feeling, emotion, aroused by this song,is engrained in my consciousness. The song produces a definite psychic response in me. Obviously the same principle of engraining emotions and reflexes is important for the actor's work.

"I often worked at night on this or that scene and managed to get

it right, but I never relied on being able to act it in the same way at a rehearsal on the following day. I knew that this creative inspiration could easily disappear, and I persistently repeated the scene, as a young actor: say, twenty-two times running, and each time I did it wrongly, without inner feeling, I repeated it an extra three times! I worked all through the night, making a mark with my nail on a piece of paper for each repeat of a scene. As a result I felt that I was able to do it more or less identically each time.

"If you remember, in *The Living Corpse* Abrezkov says to Fedya Protasov: 'How could you, such a sensitive person, have come to this?' Protasov (suppressing his tears) replies: 'I've been living this sort of life for ten years now. I've been pitied by women and friends, but for the first time by a person like you. Thank you!'

"This passage is firmly engrained in my memory.

"Or in Afinogenov's *Fear* I knew that Professor Borodin, whom I was acting, is so overwhelmed in one of the scenes that a few tears roll down his cheeks. I wanted them to be seen by the audience, and arranged with the producer that my face would be lit in such a way as to make them visible. I am now acting the role for the 200th time and always at this point four tears appear on my cheeks. I know that only four are necessary, not seven, because otherwise I would be crying and unable to control my psyche, and my nerves would be controlling me. This is the result of persistent training and a developed acting technique.

"The only authentic intonations and gestures are those which are the result of the inner impetus which produces them. And if this impetus is very strong today, the gesture will be more vivid. If the impetus is weaker tomorrow, the gesture may be the same, but less vivid. Do not try to make it more vivid—or you will strike a false note. If you bring a feeling of sweat and strain into the creative moment, you will strike a false note. There should be no physical fatigue on the stage.

"I think actors can be divided into three categories and almost all of us, at a certain stage, can say he belongs to the first, and the second, and the third.

"The first are actors who *imitate life.*

"This is the initial, young period, but some remain in it all their lives. They go to public places, cafes, parks, stick on noses, imitate friends' voices and other people's gestures. A worthy occupation, but for the early years of life.

"The second period is the period of *invention*, when the actor sees the image next to him and pictures its external characteristics.

Occasionally he proceeds from these external features to search for the inner essence of the image.

"The third period is that of *embodiment*, when an actor feels the desire to accumulate, assemble in himself, all the inner qualities of that which he is depicting on the stage, without changing his appearance if there is no special need, if it does not conflict with the logic of things. Each actor goes through all these three stages, if he does not get stranded at one of the first two."

Ostuzhev and Pevtsov are two fine actors from the two oldest theatres in Russia which are the pride of our culture. The Maly Theatre in Moscow and the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg were always the stronghold of Russian realism on the stage.

Although Ostuzhev and Pevtsov are quite different in terms of their creative personalities, they are linked not only by their search for truth in acting, but also by their boundless devotion to the art, their persistent struggle with what would appear to be insuperable obstacles on the path to the summits of acting skill.

And if we are talking about theatre people who are strong in spirit, this is most applicable to these two great actors who have rightly been given the honourable title of People's Artist of the USSR.

THE FAVOURITE OF ALL MOSCOW

Among the brilliant galaxy of theatre people whom it has been my honour to know personally People's Artist of the Soviet Union Maria Mikhailovna Blyumental-Tamarina belongs to those whose art leaves an indelible impression.

She radiated charm both on the stage and in real life, and enjoyed exceptional popularity and affection not only with audiences but also among actors themselves.

People of my generation remember clearly this tiny old lady, a lively, energetic, and deeply humane actress, who possessed remarkable simplicity and gentleness, and enchanted everyone who knew her not only with her stage talent but with her intelligence, responsiveness and rare kindness.

She was born in St. Petersburg in 1859, in the family of a former serf called Klimov. There, in the capital, she attended a girls' secondary school. At an early age she became fascinated by the theatre and used to perform at school concerts in what seemed a strange genre for a young girl—reciting Gorbunov's stories about peasant life and acting primarily old women.

In 1878 she married Alexander Blyumental-Tamarin, producer and actor at the Alexandrinsky Theatre.

At first she acted only in amateur performances and it was not until the summer of 1887 that she made her debut in the professional theatre at the Petrovsky Park in Moscow, playing the part of Kitty in Dumas' tragedy *Kean.* In this production she was fortunate to be acting with the famous Russian tragedian Pavel Orlenev.

Later the young actress worked in the "Skomorokh" Theatre which was directed by the well-known producer, actor and impresario Lentovsky, past master of theatrical effects, who put on operettas and "heart-rending" melodramas. Perhaps this was why he renamed his theatre as the Theatre of Melodramas and Various Entertainments. Lentovsky was a most colourful figure in his day. He dressed in a Russian tight-fitting, long-waisted coat, an embroidered silk shirt and wore simple townspeople's bottle-shaped boots.

As a young man Lentovsky had studied under Shchepkin, worked at the Maly Theatre, toured the provinces, and then organised "in style" a theatre of operetta in the Hermitage Public Garden in Moscow, hiring a scenery-painter from Paris, who worked at the Grand Opera.

Lentovsky was undoubtedly a gifted producer and theatre organiser. Stanislavsky had great respect for him. It was the age of the great names in the Russian stage, the age of Yermolova, Yuzhin, Lensky, Gorev and Pravdin, who enchanted audiences in Moscow, while the talents of Savina, Komissarzhevskava, Strelskava, Varlamov and Davydov shone in St. Petersburg. Unfortunately in most cases the talent of these outstanding Russian actors and actresses was wasted on a highly superficial repertoire. But how they acted!

A well-known Moscow theatre critic of the day, Vlas Doroshevich, gave an interesting account of his impressions of Yermolova's acting:

"The play is *The Unequal Struggle*. The curtain rises. On the stage Yermolova is making jam. There is no sign of stormy happenings yet. A calm, young girl, a happy life. She has not yet fallen in love. Nobody has stolen her beloved. There is no cause for suffering. Her partner, Pravdin, asks:

"'What sort of jam are you making?'

"Yermolova replies: 'Cherry jam.'

"But how she replies! You would think she was making it out of her own liver!"

It was in this atmosphere that Maria Blyumental-Tamarina began her stage career.

As soon as she embarked on the professional stage she decided that her appearance did not suit the role of the "ingénue comique et dramatique". In this respect the well-known impresario and theatre administrator Rudzevich made her the following "compliment" in the hope of giving her confidence:

"You have such eyes, my dear, that the first squire who sees you on the stage will present you with a whole village! Honest to God!"

Maria Blyumental-Tamarina

Blyumental-Tamarina's development was greatly influenced by her work in Kharkov under the producer Nikolai Sinelnikov, who possessed a great talent for revealing an actor's capabilities, by proceeding not so much from the external "fabric" as from the inner qualities. He agreed completely with the actress's decision to play character parts.

While working with Sinelnikov Blyumental-Tamarina met the famous actress Strepetova who was on a guest tour in Kharkov. It was suggested that Blyumental-Tamarina should play Kabanikha in Ostrovsky's *The Thunderstorm*. The role seemed entirely unsuited to her physique. Kabanikha was traditionally played by large women; this was thought to be most effective for the role.

She was convinced that the role was not for her, but Strepetova managed to dispel her doubts.

"Haven't you ever noticed in merchant families how the daughter-in-law is tyrannised by a nasty, sly, little woman—not a big one—who nags at her day in, day out. Big women are kindness itself!"

Blyumental-Tamarina managed the role of Kabanikha splendidly, and Strepetova, who played Katerina, was full of praise for the young actress's talent, her remarkable ability to transform herself on the stage. Strepetova understood Blyumental-Tamarina's worry about her physique very well. This outstanding artiste and famous guest actress, one of the finest performers of tragic and dramatic roles, had a highly unprepossessing appearance: she was short and angular, with a slight stoop.

Yet Strepetova's talent really did make the audience overlook her physical shortcomings and fall under the spell of her powerful feelings. Blyumental-Tamarina admired her acting and was proud to have been cast with her.

I did not become personally acquainted with Blyumental-Tamarina until she was well advanced in years, at the beginning of the 1930s, when she was acting at the former Korsh Theatre in Moscow, in the premises of the present branch of the Art Theatre.

In spite of her ripe old age she was a frequent visitor to our club and took an active part in many club concerts, evenings and *kapoustniks*. She was as energetic, cheerful, and clear-minded as any of the young people who, incidentally, worshipped her.

I remember in March 1933 in connection with International Women's Day the club organised an evening devoted to this

Blyumental-Tamarina with a group of prominent artists at the Moscow Theatre of Folk Art, 1936

outstanding actress and public figure, the favourite of the Moscow audiences. By then she had already been working in the theatre for forty-five years.

On this particular day she was feeling most unwell. Her foot had started to ache badly. Still she came to the evening, "dressed in style", except for a slipper on one foot. The impression of formality immediately gave way to a special relaxed, family atmosphere on the stage. She herself was such a homely, kind and benevolent person. She not only acted scenes from plays in her repertoire, but also related several episodes from her life. I managed to jot down a few notes.

We learned from her that a personal family drama had brought her to the stage. She had had to part with her husband.

"But every cloud has a silver lining," she said. "I had to work in order to keep my children, and this made me go to the professional stage. True, at first I was recommended to an amateur dramatic

Blyumental-Tamarina as the Mother in Victor Gusev's *Fame*

group in Tverskaya Street where I met Stanislavsky and those splendid actors Artyom and Luzhsky. But I spent only one year there. At this time amateur performances were being given in the Hermitage Garden, organised by a certain Misha Pironé, the son of the shoemaker who supplied footwear to the Bolshoi and Maly theatres. This was how he distributed the roles: anyone who could sell 100 roubles' worth of tickets got the role of the lover. The heroine had to sell 150 roubles' worth. Pironé knew there was no point in asking me to sell tickets, but I had been acting old women quite well ever since I was young. I told him I had no one who would buy a ticket. 'Never mind, you can act anyway!' he replied.

"Even without my help so many tickets were sold that the floor of the hall seemed ready to cave in. It was the end of the last century. I acted at Korsh's from 1900, then had three seasons at Sukhodolsky's drama theatre in Moscow. I played hundreds of roles. And I loved acting in comedies by Gogol and Ostrovsky.

"When the October Revolution came," she continued, "the best section of the actors realised the great mission being carried out by

the proletariat. I remember the first May Day celebrations after the October Revolution, in 1918. Actors were allocated places where they were to give concerts and I was sent to the Zamoskvoretsky theatre. In the middle of the evening the concert organiser, the ballerina Podgoretskaya, came up and said there had been a phone call from the Kremlin to invite us there. They sent a car for us. So we arrived at the Kremlin. Comrade Lenin was addressing a meeting, and we were fortunate enough to arrive at the beginning of his speech. When the meeting was over Podgoretskaya invited Lenin to attend our concert. He replied that he was very tired, but when he saw our faces, our shining eyes which were longing to see him at the concert, he agreed to stay and watch the whole programme. He reacted splendidly to our performances, and laughed a lot when I was on. (I recited, or rather, acted the Chekhov short story *A Defenceless Creature.*) Then he shook hands with each of us and retired.

"During the Civil War and the years of economic dislocation which followed it food was scarce. Actors invited to give concerts were often "paid" in food. I received my first food ration when I played to a motorised company. A Red Army man called Ozerov (I even remember his name), who handed out the food to the performers, said to me:

"'You were good in *The Marriage*, old girl, but you're not much of a matchmaker!'

"'Why?' I asked.

"'Because you let the man get away. But never mind. Don't get upset!'

"And he gave me an extra portion of sugar."

Blyumental-Tamarina had a special, purely Russian talent. This is why she was equally loved by an ordinary Red Army soldier and the famous Polar explorer Academician Otto Schmidt, before whom she performed at our club after the famous Chelyuskin expedition.

Towards the end of her life she worked at the Maly Theatre which welcomed her into its family with open arms. She was also being filmed literally up to the last days of her life.

She was the oldest actress at the Maly. She did not have to adjust herself to the work of "Shchepkin's house", for her art had always rested on a profoundly realist basis, and her excellent Moscow pronunciation and deep knowledge of Russian everyday life linked her closely with the traditions of the great Russian playwright Ostrovsky.

Yet she did not confine herself exclusively to a classical repertoire.

It was on the stage of the Maly in 1936 that she created the unforgettable character of the Russian mother, Motylkova, in Victor Gusev's play *Fame*, a character who combines sincere humanity and warmth with a high sense of civic duty and Soviet patriotism.

I remember how impressed the audience was by Motylkova's monologue about the heroism of her son Vassily who was badly wounded in an attempt to save the town from an avalanche. In Blyumental-Tamarina's rendering this monologue sounded like an appeal to all the sons of our Motherland, and the figure of the old mother acquired a generalised, symbolic meaning.

In 1938 Blyumental-Tamarina departed from us. Her acting remains alive in the memory of the people and received high recognition during her lifetime. She was one of the first ten people in the Soviet theatre, together with Stanislavsky, Nemirovich-Danchenko and Kachalov, to receive the title of People's Artist of the Soviet Union. The government awarded her the Orders of Lenin and the Red Banner of Labour.

She devoted exactly half a century to the service of the Russian theatre. And more than twenty years to Soviet audiences.

It can rightly be said of this fine actress that she remained to the end of her days a true favourite of all Moscow.

THE RUSSIAN NIGHTINGALE

All his life an actor feels the attraction of the smell of the wings, the footlights, and, most important, the atmosphere of the crowded auditorium.

Few actors have the courage to retire at the right time, turn to other roles, and give up playing young heroes and heroines, for theatre make-up also has limits to the amount it can "rejuvenate".

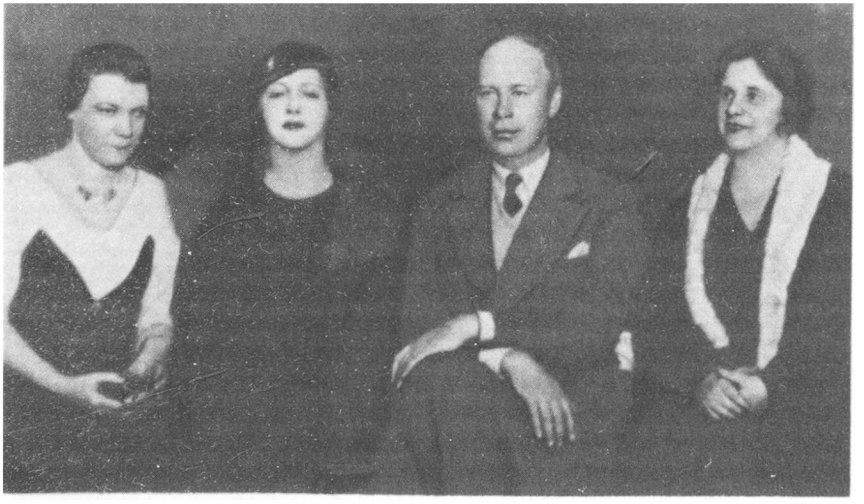
It is equally difficult for vocalists to leave the stage, and many a tragic moment has been experienced by opera singers when their voices started to "let them down", when they began to age.

Barsova left the theatre as soon as she felt that her art was beginning to fade. In 1952 this outstanding Russian singer celebrated her sixtieth birthday.

Her magnificent skill and remarkable vocal technique still produced a tremendous impression on the audiences at her concerts. But opera demands that an artist should have not only a perfect command of his voice, but also the ability to create the physical appearance of the role. She decided once and for all to leave the Bolshoi Theatre in which her talent had flourished. She was equally merciless in putting an end to her concerts, and made a farewell tour of the Soviet Union with the Osipov orchestra of folk instruments. She had decided to preserve the full brilliance of her talent in the memory of her contemporaries.

"Only the decline of the setting sun can produce a sensation of beauty. The decline of an artist leaves a feeling of pity," she remarked somewhat sadly to her friends.

Valeria Barsova



I. Jaunzem, N. Rozenel, S. Prokofiev and V. Barsova soon after S. Prokofiev's arrival in the USSR

The name of Barsova has left an indelible impression on the history of Russian vocal art.

Musicians claim that her voice combined the broad cantilena singing of the Russian vocal school with the virtuoso school of Italian *bel canto.* Barsova astounded audiences by the remarkable vocal ease, purity of her timbre, and gracefulness of performance.

She recalled the great pleasure she had in her work with Stanislavsky at the operatic studio of the Bolshoi Theatre. The great master of the stage taught her to place high demands upon herself, to respect the audience, and to seek for truth on the stage. At the same time Stanislavsky devoted considerable attention to developing acting technique and avoiding operatic stereotypes.

"When I was rehearsing *Rigoletto* with him," Barsova told us, "he made me sing Gilda's aria while I was *moving.* The rehearsal room in his house in Leontyevsky Alley was full of theatrical accessories. He demanded greater mobility and normal behaviour on the stage. This is much easier for the dramatic actor than the opera singer. Yet I learnt to adjust my breathing so that I took a breath after every five steps on the stairs. It is extremely difficult to combine singing with active movement. I have remembered Stanislavsky's lessons all my

life. How they helped me in *The Barber of Seville*! The singer has to dance in Rosine's aria. If you can't space your breathing properly it is very difficult to get through the aria. But the most important thing Stanislavsky taught us was to delve deep into the character, into its essence!"

Music critics have often noted Barsova's acting as well as vocal skill. The characters of Antonida and Ludmila in *Ivan Susanin* and *Ruslan and Ludmila* created by her on the stage of the Bolshoi Theatre were acknowledged as true masterpieces of operatic art.

At the same time she was also unique on the concert stage, enchanting audiences with her virtuoso technique and expressive performance. No wonder she was nicknamed the "Russian nightingale".

At one of the evenings in the Masters of Arts' Club she was even presented with a special prize—a live nightingale in a cage!

She was touched by this symbolic gift, but went into the country the next day and set the nightingale free.

"Let it sing in its native woods. It's a nightingale, you know, not a canary!"

The lives of Valeria Barsova and Antonina Nezhdanova have something in common. One can confidently say that Barsova followed directly in the traditions of the great Russian singer.

Both were brought up in families which loved music. Both trained at the Moscow Conservatoire under Professor Mazetti. Both took up teaching in their early years. Nezhdanova taught at the Odessa town school for girls, and Barsova, with the help of the Director of the Moscow Conservatoire, the famous Russian composer M. Ippolitov-Ivanov, taught choral singing in a municipal elementary school in Moscow.

Nezhdanova graduated with flying colours from the Conservatoire in 1902. Her debut in the part of Antonida in the Bolshoi Theatre brought her well-deserved recognition, and she was immediately taken into the theatre troupe for leading roles.

Barsova finished her studies in the same conservatoire in 1919, but her professional career began in 1915 in Baliev's "Fledermaus" Theatre. By 1917, however, she was singing in Zimin's opera, and in 1920 she joined the Bolshoi Theatre which became her home.

A fascinating page in Barsova's professional biography is her performances with Chaliapin. As is often the case with artists, it was pure chance that Barsova first performed with the great singer. In 1920 Chaliapin was appearing at the Moscow Hermitage Theatre. The posters had gone up for *The Barber of Seville*, and opera lovers

were looking forward to hearing Chaliapin as Don Basilio and Nezhdanova as Rosine. Then Nezhdanova suddenly fell ill. A suitable substitute could not be found among the rest of the cast, so they began to look among the beginners. Barsova had prepared the part of Rosine at the conservatoire and was invited to sing it.

She later reminisced about this as follows:

"Could I ever have dreamt of becoming the great Chaliapin's partner? When I read the poster with the names of Chaliapin and Nezhdanova, my only dream was to get a ticket for the production, even if it was in the gallery. You cannot imagine my excitement when I was suddenly asked to take the place of the famous Nezhdanova. I loved the part, as I did the whole of Rossini's opera—gay, cheerful, full of fervour and fire. To this very day I do not know how I dared to accept the offer—to sing with such a famous, exacting partner as Chaliapin.

"Then, suddenly, success! And not only with the public, but with Chaliapin himself! He approved of my performance and instructed his secretary Dvorishchev to invite 'this little girl' to sing with him again. He went on calling me 'the little girl'. My last meeting with Chaliapin was in Riga in 1930 where we were both invited as guest singers. And again in *The Barber of Seville.* We sang at the Latvian National Opera. Chaliapin in Italian, I in Russian, and the rest of the cast in Lettish. The performance was a great success, and Chaliapin presented me with his portrait signed 'Wishing you happiness with all my heart'. I can still remember Chaliapin's unique voice and brilliant acting."

Valeria Barsova was undoubtedly an outstanding expert in her field. Everything connected with her profession—the vocal school—she knew perfectly, in theory and in practice.

She was besieged by young people wishing to master the secrets of vocal skill. The professional talks which she gave in the Central Club always aroused great interest among young vocalists. And the questions they put to her at these evenings!

She was asked about the special features of the Russian vocal school and how it differed from the Italian, and also numerous questions connected with vocal technique.

She believed that the theoretical foundations of the Italian vocal school had been formed as a result of the manner of performance of Italian singers, the principles of which, in turn, were conditioned by the music of Italian composers. But the Italian school had also

undergone a substantial evolution, together with the development of the aesthetic principles of Italian vocal music. The old Italian school, which was based on *bel canto* (beautiful singing), gave way to the search for dramatic expressiveness. These tendencies were most fully embodied in the work of Verdi and his operatic school and were connected with the general realist trend of 19th-century art.

"But the text in Italian vocal music still does not play a particularly important role," she said. "Therefore we often find the repetition of words, even whole phrases, in classical Italian arias and ensembles, which frequently obscures the meaning, for everything is subordinated to the musical form and the aim of revealing the singer's vocal mastery as fully as possible. One must admit that Italian music offers great scope for the vocalist to demonstrate his range and mastery of cantilena, and also the virtuoso technique of his voice, its flexibility and range of colour. Whereas in Russian music the word and expressiveness of speech play an enormous part. The link between music and words is clearly seen in Glinka's work. Dargomyzhsky expressed this tendency of Russian musical realism in his famous motto: 'I want the sound to give direct expression to the word.' For the Russian singer his vocal skill is not an aim, but a means of revealing the musical image in conjunction with the dramatic image, on the basis of the organic combination of word and sound. Whereas the Italian singer strives to convey emotion in its generalised and 'beautiful' form, the Russian singer creates character—concrete, realistic and vivid.

"Listen to Chaliapin's records," said Barsova, "and you will understand what skill was required to convey so perfectly and authentically by vocal means the most subtle, intimate and powerful dramatic states of the human soul."

One of the young singers asked Barsova whether public duties did not distract her from singing.

She smiled and replied:

"There are, unfortunately, singers who think that the whole world is contained in a high C sharp or B flat, in the sound of their voices. A singer is first and foremost an artist, a creator, and he cannot live without vivid impressions, without contact with the beautiful that has been created by art, nature and life. He cannot live apart from the great problems and feelings which concern our society, our people. A singer should be able to establish contact with the most varied audiences. He should be capable of being understood by children, students, collective farmers and industrial workers. I have sung to audiences of children, collective farmers, and eminent scientists.

And everywhere I have felt in touch with the audience. I have seen smiles appear on the faces of scientists and watched them nod their heads in time to the music. I have seen collective farmers wipe the tears from their eyes when I sang 'The Mountain Ash'. And I have watched the eyes of children shine as they listened to children's songs. I have also been to a railway depot where the workers came with greasy hands to hear Barsova. I had to find the way to their hearts. If I had thought only of sound I would never have touched their hearts. In order to be understood, you must know and love your audience, you must share its feelings. An audience is very sensitive. Sometimes I don't feel in the mood for singing, I just don't want to sing. Then I always notice that although I am singing properly the audience remains indifferent. It senses that I am *insincere.*

"I should also like to add that an artist should never feel envious. If you see that others sing better than you, don't envy them, but try to acquire something from them. When I took up singing no one gave us the benefit of their experience. I taught myself, by listening to Nezhdanova, studying her fine work, her skill, and trying to emulate this great example."

This is what Barsova said at an evening with young vocalists in the Central Art Workers' Club.

I was present at many talks which she had with the young, heard her speeches at jury meetings, and witnessed her disputes with colleagues on questions of vocal skill and the future development of the Soviet opera. Barsova always attached great importance to the problems of interpreting a musical work. She was a zealous champion of realist art.

After leaving the stage Barsova devoted herself entirely to teaching and public duties. In Sochi too, where she spent several months a year, she found herself work, training young singers at the local philharmonic, helping amateur singers, and appearing on television.

On June 14, 1955, she wrote to me from Sochi:

"I am involved in a great deal of work here connected with a review of amateur singing, preparations for the final concert and the selection of the best singers for a local amateur art review. I must say that the results are most interesting. There are some very gifted performers—of various genres. There's no end of social work here. Recently there was a review of children's music schools. I suggested

Valeria Barsova. Portrait by V. Masyutin

organising a children's choir. This was most enthusiastically received. As you can see, I have my hands full here too. I am extremely well, and full of beans. I feel guilty about leaving my work at the Central Club before time, but I am lulling my conscience with the work here."

Then follows a postscript which shows that Barsova's interests were by no means limited to her profession:

"Please do something for me—find me a copy of Nehru's book on the new India. You will probably try to get one for yourself, so do remember me. And please find out whether the subscription list for the *World History* series opened before the war is still valid. If not, put down my name for it again."

In a letter of August 6, 1955, Barsova again describes her activities and expresses her ideas on the work of the Central Art Workers' Club:

"...As always I am busy with young singers, go to concerts and films, and do not notice the passing of time. I was most pleased with the press comments on performances by the variety team of the

Central Art Workers' Club. I never thought they would do so well. The most valuable thing in variety satire is trenchant ridicule of shortcomings in society, in truly artistic form, of course. The Moscow Variety Theatre suffers a great deal because it does not do this, and only goes in for guest tours. *The First Step* (the name of the Central Club variety team's programme — *B. F.*) will be followed by a second and a third and may give birth to real satire. It is so essential in our art!"

Barsova was always interested in the progress of young artists—not only vocalists, but also variety, circus and drama performers. And the young repaid her with great affection and respect.

On July 1, 1958, she wrote to me:

"Dear Boris Mikhailovich,

"I was pleased to get your letter. I so much wanted to hear about you and the Club.... I had read about it in the newspapers. The receptions of foreign visitors, the evening guest performances, but, of course, I should like to know more details.

"I too have been organising 'receptions' here. I have just entertained our circus performers who enchanted the Parisians recently with their programme. It really is an interesting one: the young performers showed agility, strength, artistic taste, and excellent presentation. The reception coincided with my birthday (which I have been celebrating with more reluctance in recent years). Then I am working with the singers at the Sochi Philharmonic and I am very pleased with my 'song-birds'. They flew away on guest tours and sent me some good press comments. Now they have returned and settled down to lessons again. Singers come from various parts for advice on vocal questions."

I could quote many more passages from the voluminous pile of Barsova's letters which show that after her retirement from the stage she continued to take a passionate interest in the arts.

Barsova first became involved in public duties in the 1930s when she was elected a deputy to the first Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. It must also be said that her work as president of the Central Art Workers' Club was an excellent training.

Barsova was one of the initiators of patronage in her field, a system by which well-known artists give a helping hand to amateur art groups, and she was always extremely helpful in this useful and necessary work. She made Moskvin put an appeal in the press to masters of Soviet art to give concrete assistance to amateur art groups in workers' clubs. She sat on almost all the juries for

All-Union and All-Russia amateur art competitions. I remember her attendance at numerous meetings which continued into the early hours. Each competitor was given a careful professional examination and received a qualified assessment of his vocal ability. How many young amateurs in the arts have to thank her for their subsequent musical education!

Unfortunately many untalented people also claimed her time, taking advantage of her kindness, and insisting that she should listen to their "exquisite singing". She never refused anyone, but having become convinced that a person had no ear for music or no voice, she would tell him firmly and adamantly:

"You may not be an artist, but you must be a citizen!" paraphrasing Nekrasov's famous words.

A person who continues to work and take an active part in public affairs does not notice the approach of old age. But as soon as he breaks the rhythm, age is upon him. The concept of old age was inapplicable to Barsova, even when she had her seventy-fifth birthday. The years had told on her physically, but she remained young at heart.

She refused to celebrate it officially. And there were good reasons for this. Her husband, Boris Kamsky, had died shortly before.

Nevertheless the Sochi organisations insisted on a television broadcast about the famous singer.

"Visiting Barsova" was the name of the anniversary programme broadcast in June 1967. "Villa Valeria" was taken over by the Sochi television studio, causing the owner considerable inconvenience. The celebration of this last anniversary is described in a letter from her which I received in the middle of July 1967.

"I have been meaning to write for a long time, but the preparations for my anniversary organised by the television took up a lot of time. I am sending you what I said and also what was said about me. The broadcast was accompanied by photographs of me in everyday life and on the stage, and a demonstration of gramophone records. They say it was interesting, and I have received many laudatory comments. The programme was rated number one for this year. I am sending you photographs and other material in an album which I should like you to keep as a memento (after taking everything out, of course!). The most interesting thing was at the banquet arranged by Boris' colleagues. It was in Sochi's best restaurant, the Primorsky. Somebody announced on the radio to all

People's Artist of the USSR Valeria Barsova at her 75th birthday celebration

present that so-and-so was celebrating her birthday at one of the tables. Then what happened! I can't tell you! Everyone rose to their feet with glasses of wine and the orchestra began to play my favourite song: 'I remembered the time, the time of youth, and my heart grew so warm.' It was so moving that I could not help following the music and singing, so that I would not cry. After this the doors opened and they carried in a huge cake with seventy-five lighted candles. So that's how I celebrated my birthday, far from Moscow and from my beloved friends. Something unusual happened to me, I don't know whether it was from deep emotion, or whether this is my last word, my final anniversary. Forgive me for writing so 'melodramatically', but I have never felt like this before. To quote Pushkin's Tatiana:

I've done. I dare not read it through;
I am half dead with fear and shame,
But I will trust myself to you
With confidence, in honour's name.

"And now I am taking some baths and various medicines under doctors' supervision, i.e., putting myself in order. The tombstone for Boris' grave will be ready in October, and in November I am leaving for Moscow, for my friends. I followed, read and rejoiced at your writers' festival (the 4th Soviet Writers' Congress.— *B.F.*)."

In November Barsova became seriously ill, and in December we received the sad news that she was no more, that splendid singer of our times, the "Russian nightingale". Never had I thought that I would have to say a parting word at her funeral!

"Villa Valeria" was bequeathed by the singer to the Sochi City Soviet for cultural purposes. An art school has been opened there.

THE THEATRE IN TVERSKOI BOULEVARD

Leafing through my diaries and returning again to this sad subject, I am convinced that the facts described by me do not require a literary frame. They speak for themselves, even when stated in the impersonal language of official records.

On Monday, September 25, 1950, at 10 p.m. I was telephoned by N. Sukhotskaya, a producer at the Kamerny Theatre, and told that Alexander Tairov had died an hour ago.

Sukhotskaya was ringing at the request of Alisa Koonen who knew of my sincere warm attitude to Tairov and our friendly feelings towards each other.

Tairov no longer had a theatre.... A new one, the Pushkin Theatre, occupied the building in Tverskoi Boulevard, near Herzen's house.

Some of the Kamerny Theatre actors had joined the new troupe. They even included Tairov's favourite students. He was particularly upset about this. But what else could they have done?...

It would have been impossible to hold the civic funeral in a building where everything recalled the sad end not only of Tairov, but of the theatre created by him. Sukhotskaya conveyed to me a request from Koonen that the funeral be held in the Central Art Workers' Club.

The unexpected death of this great theatrical figure, whose name was well-known not only in our country but far beyond its bounds, was a heavy loss for Soviet art.

Around midnight I telephoned the Arts Committee, where they used to work late at that time. Nobody there knew about Tairov's sudden death and they seemed confused, trying to assess the event.

Alexander Tairov. Drawing by N. Andrevev. 1920s

I expressed the opinion that the funeral ceremony could not be held in a building which now belonged to another theatre. This would have been extremely tactless, and Tairov's family would not have given its consent.

These considerations were taken into account. The civic funeral was scheduled for September 28 in the Central Club and the burial in the Novodevichye Cemetery. Tairov had once expressed the desire not to be cremated.

On that sad day I arrived at the Central Club at 7 o'clock in the morning. Tairov's friends and theatre colleagues had assembled very early.

Shortly afterwards the coffin with the body was carried into the Large Hall of the Central Club, which had been emptied of chairs, and placed on a catafalque.

Alisa Koonen arrived at 10 o'clock. Her outer control emphasised even more her inner emotions.

Together with Tairov's sister Alexandra and N. Sukhotskaya she made her way towards the coffin.

It was not until the last moment that her strength failed. After walking up the steps of the catafalque she fell on her knees before the coffin of her husband, teacher and friend.

Musicians from the former Kamerny Theatre played for the last time the funeral march from *Adrienne Lecouvreur.*

At 1 p.m. those great Russian actresses, Alexandra Yablochkina and Yevdokia Turchaninova, took their places at the head of the coffin. The guard of honour was completed by Ivan Kozlovsky and Ilya Ehrenburg.

The hall was packed, restless and full of wreaths.

Then came the sad rite of farewell. And at the end a sincere, impassioned speech by Ehrenburg about the fact that "professional disputes are forgotten beside an artist's ashes".

The writer said what was in everyone's minds but was not spoken aloud: a great artist had died, who had experienced both success and failure in his time, but in whom the flame of art had never been quenched.

Koonen had asked that the funeral procession should stop in Bolshaya Bronnaya Street by the house where she had spent the best years of her life with Tairov, but this turned out to be impossible. The transport authorities objected. They went to the Novodevichye Cemetery by the shortest route.

About three months before this tragic event Tairov and Koonen came to see me several times in the Central Club. After the Kamerny Theatre was closed down they were both transferred to the Vakhtangov Theatre.

Tairov said that their presence in this theatre, an excellent one in its own way, was pointless. They actually did nothing and were simply counted as members of the troupe. This was quite natural. The Vakhtangov Theatre had its own style and traditions.

Tairov dreamed of producing a modern play about the struggle of progressive forces in Spain, *Manuela Sanchez,* by the Spanish playwright César Arconada. But the repertoire of the Vakhtangov Theatre was firmly established, so he asked me to put him in touch with an amateur group where he could produce the play with Koonen in the leading role.

I tried to help him, but without success. Then I decided to have the play put on at the Central Club, but Tairov's illness and its fatal outcome prevented this.

A few days after his death Koonen invited me to visit her at home. She wanted my advice on some personal matters.

This was the first time I had been to their apartment. The servants of an aristocratic family by the name of Vyrubov had inhabited this two-storey wing at 16, Bolshaya Bronnaya St. before the October Revolution. The house adjoined the building of the Kamerny Theatre. The apartment occupied by Tairov and Koonen belonged to the theatre and was connected to it.The entrance to the small house retained traces of bygone days. It had old doors, like the ones in aristocratic houses.

I went up the narrow stone staircase to the first floor and heard the voice of Tairov's sister on the top landing. She led me into a large room divided by an arch. The furnishing was simple and untidy. Piles of books on a divan. Porcelain, elegant bric-a-brac, and curious toys in glass cupboards. Obviously these were souvenirs and presents received during guest tours and in memory of anniversaries.

On the walls were sketches of sets for Kamerny Theatre productions during the early period. They included a large panel by the well-known artist and Tairov's former colleague, Yakulov.

Alisa Koonen came out, embraced me silently and kissed me on the forehead. This was silent gratitude for my part in Tairov's funeral.

Our talk lasted about two hours.

She told me that the artist Ryndin was trying to arrange for the Kamerny Theatre archive, mock-ups and sketches, to be handed over to the Bakhrushin Museum....

I heard for the first time about Tairov's last few days and the sad course of his illness which began about two months before his death.

The news of the forthcoming closure of the Kamerny Theatre spread round Moscow like wildfire. The theatre's last performance was *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, one of its top favourites. By then it was already known that a new team had been appointed to run the Pushkin Theatre which had superceded the Kamerny Theatre.

The theatre was packed, as if it were a first night. The actors who took part in this memorable performance on May 30, 1949, and the members of the audience remember that Koonen played her role with exceptional inspiration. The applause at the end of the play was tumultuous, and the curtain rose many times. The performers were saying farewell to the public which had given them such a warm welcome. The audience gave a standing ovation to Koonen and kept calling for Tairov. But that evening he did not leave his office. A

Alisa Koonen

young student at the Moscow Art Theatre's studio broke away from a group of young people who had given the play a particularly rowdy reception; jumping over the orchestra pit onto the stage he pinned a badge with the traditional seagull of the Moscow Art Theatre on Koonen. The doors of the iron theatre curtain, on which only a symbolic lock was missing, drew slowly together.

At first after the closure of the theatre Tairov kept his spirits up and tried to make Koonen do the same. But he soon sank into apathy. He began to ramble, to worry about how they were repairing the theatre. He would walk along Tverskoi Boulevard, peering anxiously into the windows of the theatre building.

On one of these days the actor G. Budarov met him in Tverskoi Boulevard. Tairov was relatively calm on this occasion. They exchanged a few words and parted, but half an hour later Budarov saw Tairov with his face pressed against a tree. He was staring fixedly in the direction of the theatre and tears were streaming down his face. At that moment they were taking down the Kamerny Theatre sign from the façade.

Tairov's illness began to progress rapidly and after a short while came the tragic end.

I sat for a long time with his wife, reminiscing about the lively, energetic, intelligent and quickwitted Tairov.

I remembered how, in July 1941, during a nazi air raid, the patrol squad sent me and a small group of pedestrians into the Kamerny Theatre air-raid shelter. The cemented cellar was in semi-darkness, lit only by the blue light of shaded bulbs. The actresses were nervous. The actors silent. Someone was moving chess men on the board, in the dark. Some others were having a game of dominoes by the light of a flickering candle. But one could sense the tension produced by a feeling of helplessness. The loudspeaker rigged up in the shelter warned monotonously: "This is an air-raid warning, citizens!" Bombs were dropping nearby. We later discovered that one of them hit the granite statue of Timiryazev by the Nikitskiye Gate.

Last to enter the shelter was Tairov. He left his office only under pressure from the anti-aircraft defence squad. And not long before this a bomb had hit the Vakhtangov Theatre, killing the well-known actor Vasily Kuza.

Tairov appeared as if he were ashamed of giving way. But if he had been forced to desert his "captain's bridge" at a difficult moment, it was not in order to hide from enemy bombs. No, he had come to the shelter with the sole aim of cheering up his comrades! He jokingly promised the bravest ones the best roles next season.... Yes, they could choose what they liked.

At this moment the director of the theatre, A. Bogatyrvov, appeared, a round-faced man on the plump side, who was fond of joking.

"Well, with a director like this we'll be all right! His surname alone will do the trick! True, it does remind us of some unpleasant episodes in our history. Doesn't it, Monsieur Bogatyrvov?" joked Tairov, referring to the scandal connected with the Kamerny Theatre production of Demyan Bedny's *Bogatyri* (Giants) in 1936. The production had been stopped and the theatre accused of depicting Russian folk-heroes in a distorted way.

The air raid was over. The radio announced the "all clear".

Memories of the beginning of the Patriotic War gave way to others linked with the period of the great victories of the Soviet Army, the defeat of the fascist hordes.

The theatres returned to the capital from evacuation. The traditions of the pre-war period were re-established. Theatres even began to celebrate anniversaries.

Alexander Tairov in his study

A year before the end of the war, on June 19, 1944, the Moscow Art Theatre celebrated Ivan Moskvin's seventieth birthday with a performance of *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich*. Moskvin's fine tenor rang out, clear and young. His excellent make-up concealed the signs of advanced years.

After the triumphal end of the play the festivities began. Tairov came onto the stage.

"Ivan Mikhailovich, you say on the stage 'Am I tsar or am I not?' Of course, you are tsar. You reign on the stage and bestow your powerful art upon the audience with truly regal generosity!"

And in February 1945 Moscow celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Kamerny Theatre.

The newspaper *Sovietskoye Iskusstvo* (Soviet Art) informed its readers that "Those present warmly greeted the theatre's founder and director, People's Artist of the RSFSR A. Tairov, who spoke of the creative path which the theatre had traversed."

On the occasion of the anniversary Tairov was presented with the highest government award, the Order of Lenin. By this time the theatre had put on seventy-five productions.

Among the numerous delegations at the anniversary evening was a group of "hussars" led by Maria Babanova. This was a team from the Moscow Drama Theatre, directed by Okhlopkov, who greeted their neighbours with a little song entitled "Long, Long Ago...." from the production *Nurslings of Fame*, but with different words.

It must be said that this time the "hussars" were far less militant than their commander Okhlopkov, who had once threatened Tairov with "military operations" when the Realistic Theatre was merged with the Kamerny Theatre in 1937.

The complications of finding new plays frequently resulted in the Kamerny Theatre having a somewhat motley repertoire, although to a certain extent this diversity—from high tragedy to buffoonery—was in keeping with the principles of the "synthetic theatre" proclaimed by Tairov, whereas in other theatres it usually had no logical justification. All the same the path of the Kamerny Theatre was an erratic one, a fact which was often noted by the founder and chief producer himself.

Preoccupation with the problems of "theatricality" was often an aim in itself for Tairov. The external form of the production frequently predominated over its content. In spite of this, many of his discoveries and finds have become firmly established in the theatre and are widely used by modern producers. In those days, however, both Meyerhold and Tairov, despite the differences in their views on

the theatre, were accused of "aestheticism", verging on formalism. Let the theatre specialists decide to what extent these charges are justified.

The name of Meyerhold has won deserved recognition in the history of the Soviet and world theatre. There can be no doubt that Tairov's professional life has also left a deep impression on the history of the theatre. His fame as a producer was world-wide. He was a man of extensive erudition with a profound knowledge of the theatre. It was no accident that he and his theatre frequently represented Soviet theatrical art abroad. There was a time when it was said jokingly of the Kamerny Theatre:

En route to Mexico—isn't that so?—
In Moscow too it gives a show!

In 1934 Tairov was commissioned to represent the Soviet theatre at an International Theatre Congress arranged in Rome by the Italian Royal Academy.

Strange though it may seem, this European forum with the participation of nineteen countries was convened under the programme of the Conventia Volta, set up in memory of the famous Italian physicist.

The situation at the congress was extremely complicated. It was held under the unofficial supervision of Mussolini. The agenda contained questions relating exclusively to dramatic art, which was in a state of extreme crisis in the West.

This, as Tairov told us, explained why the congress did not invite the representatives of the basic and largest theatrical profession, namely, actors, for their presence would inevitably have focussed attention on the economic crisis in the theatre and unemployment among actors in the capitalist countries.

Tairov's ideological opponents included Marinetti, the son of a millionaire and founder of futurism who later turned fascist. This seasoned demagogue, the author of some extravagant "manifestoes", tried on this occasion to shock the audience with his pseudo-revolutionary slogans. Tairov fought hard at the congress and emerged victorious, in spite of "superior enemy forces". At the front line in the battle against bourgeois culture, Tairov was always an uncompromising fighter, although "at home" he was accused of supporting that which he in fact firmly opposed as a convinced champion of socialist art.

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of Tairov's mistakes. The Kamerny Theatre was frequently and mercilessly criticised.

Even during the anniversary celebrations I had to remind Tairov of this in a joking letter in verse:

Though born without a spoon of silver,
You loved the theatre all your life.
The cruel words of a reviewer
Would often cut you like a knife.

Yet, in the word's authentic meaning,
You've shown good growth — far more than most.
And so today to your new premières
With all our hearts, we drink this toast.

May life to you, good friend, be kinder —
For which today we raise this cup,
And let us wish that strict reviewers
More often buoy your spirit up!

The Kamerny Theatre and its head traversed a complex path. This path has some important milestones: Scribe's *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, Racine's *Phèdre* translated by Valery Bryussov, Ostrovsky's *The Thunderstorm*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Hasenclever's *Antigone*, O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, Chekhov's *The Seagull*, and Gorky's *The Old Man*. The theatre was the first to put on a realist production of Vishnevsky's *An Optimistic Tragedy*, which was full of truly civic fervour, and the first Moscow theatre to acknowledge the plays of Bertolt Brecht by putting on *Dreigroschenoper*. It was a difficult path with ruts and pitfalls. But can you name me the theatre whose history contains only success and no failure?

Tairov remains in my memory as a restless, constantly searching artist who devoted his life entirely to the service of the theatre.

MEETINGS WITH NIKOLAI OKHLOPKOV

Nikolai Okhlopkov was born at the beginning of the 20th century. It was as a young man of thirty that he was appointed producer at the Realistic Theatre which then had premises in Mayakovsky Square.

The realist trend prevailing in this theatre, which developed from Studio Four of the Moscow Art Theatre, by no means conflicted with Okhlopkov's convictions, for he had always believed that it was the main mission of art to portray real life. Okhlopkov strove to revolutionise the art of the theatre and put it at the service of socialist construction.

The young producer, who had begun his career as far back as 1921 by putting on a mass show for May Day in one of the squares in Irkutsk, had worked as an actor under Meyerhold, in a troupe which included such well-known names as Babanova, Garin, Zharov, Ilyinsky, Martinson, Orlov, Raikh, Sverdlin, Shtraukh, and Yakhontov.

Perhaps it was the originality of Meyerhold's talent and Mayakovsky's genius which accelerated the process of Okhlopkov's development as a producer, and convinced him of the need to find an independent path. In the late 1920s and early 1930s he put on Mayakovsky's *The Bed-Bug* and *The Bath-House* and Vsevolod Vishnevsky's first "optimistic tragedy", *The Last, Decisive Battle.*

Already in his early youth Okhlopkov had followed Meyerhold by turning to Mayakovsky's plays—his *Mystery Bouffe.* He put on *Mystery Bouffe* in the Irkutsk Theatre in 1922.

Working in the Meyerhold Theatre Okhlopkov was able to appreciate his maître's talent, his irrepressible urge for creative experiment, yet he realised that quest should be directed primarily at strengthening the ideological impact of a production; he was attracted by heroic themes and sought for theatrical, poetic forms of expressing his ideas as a producer. Okhlopkov was bitterly opposed to bare naturalism, the naturalist reproduction of reality. His productions always contained something new, revealing aspects of the dramatic text which even the authors of the play had sometimes not noticed.

The 1920s and 1930s were a period of intense theatrical quest. Many young producers, however, contented themselves largely with attempts to impress audiences by the unexpectedness of their scenic interpretations, which often offended against common sense. Their ingenious tricks drowned the main mouthpiece of the playwright's ideas—the actor.

In his search for the image of a production Okhlopkov looked for forms which would create an atmosphere of the closest contact between the audience and the cast, which would make the audience to become, as it were, co-participants in what was taking place on the stage. The action was often invading the auditorium in his productions. He paid special attention to profound psychological treatment of the characters in a play. The actor was never a puppet in Okhlopkov's hands. Himself a first-class actor, he knew that a producer cannot and should not suppress an actor's individuality, that the producer's task is first and foremost to encourage the actor to take part in creating a production with a single overall message. Okhlopkov's ideas as a producer were often engendered in the course of rehearsals, in his remarkable ability to feel the actor and construct mises-en-scène which helped the actor reveal the essence of the role.

Okhlopkov was exacting not only with regard to playwrights, but himself as well. From the very beginning of his career as a producer he sought stage material not only in dramatic works, but in fine prose works too. His first productions at the Realistic Theatre were Stavsky's *Running Start*, Gorky's *Mother*, and Serafimovich's *The Iron Flood*. In 1934 he began to work with Nikolai Pogodin, whose plays attracted the attention of the leading theatres in the country from the late 1920s onwards. The result of this collaboration was a production of *The Aristocrats*, which aroused stormy debate in the theatre world.

Pogodin's play was based on his observations during a visit to the

ikolai Okhlopkov

construction site of the White Sea-Baltic Canal. At the First Congress of Soviet Writers Pogodin said that he had been struck by the extraordinary variety of people working there ... from witch doctors to Bolshevik educators. All these people were building the canal and at certain moments came into dramatic contact with one another. The play aimed at showing the humanity of the Soviet order, the return to life of people who had seemed lost to society.

The first theatrical discussion on *The Aristocrats* took place in 1935 at the Moscow Masters of Arts' Club in Staropimenovsky Alley. I spent a long time deciding whom to invite to chair the discussion of a production with such an unusual theme. It must be someone who could help to explain the social message of the production, its ideological value, and someone who knew the sphere, the environment which had attracted the attention of the playwright and producer.

I decided to invite Andrei Vyshinsky who had just been appointed Procurator of the USSR. It turned out that he had already seen the production and had many critical comments to make.

"I wouldn't be a good chairman, either for the author or the producer.... My office obliges me to prosecute, not to defend!" Vyshinsky joked.

I assured him that this would merely make the discussion more interesting, for there would be quite enough defence even without him. The production was very popular both with the general public and the theatre world.

The combination of the names of Vyshinsky and Okhlopkov attracted many Moscow actors to the club cellar, to say nothing of the cast of the production.

I do not remember the names of all who spoke in this debate, which was organised by the club after evening theatre performances. But I remember the general atmosphere of the meeting very well. The chairman's introductory speech betokened the stormy debate which was to follow. Vyshinsky questioned the play's educational value, accused the theatre of romanticising the criminal world, and expressed doubt as to whether this was what audiences should be given. Did the theatre really think this theme was of topical interest?

Okhlopkov and Pogodin retaliated at first with reasoned argument. Then a heated discussion arose. Okhlopkov became so nervous that he even left the hall. All subsequent attacks on the production were bravely countered by Pogodin. True, he was supported not only by the troupe of the Realistic Theatre, but by many other speakers.

Nikolai Okhlopkov at a rehearsal

Shortly afterwards *Pravda* and other newspapers published favourable reviews of the production.

"A brilliant production," wrote Konstantin Trenyov. "Firstly, in terms of language, then acting and production technique which on this occasion makes Okhlopkov's method extremely convincing."

In 1936 the first Theatre of Folk Art was set up in Mayakovsky Square, in the premises of the former Music Hall.

Its programmes changed every five to ten days. The performers were amateurs from Moscow and all over the Soviet Union. Okhlopkov was invited to be artistic director, and I was appointed director of this unusual establishment. The theatre's company included the producers S. Alexeyev, A. Bogatyryov and N. Frid. The ballet master I. Moiseyev was in charge of the choreography, L. Knipper of the music, and S. Margolin of the physical culture and acrobatics section.

Well-known theatre artists were invited to design the sets. Individual productions were entrusted to such celebrated Moscow producers as I. Bersenev, N. Gorchakov and V. Fyodorov.

The producers travelled to various regions and republics for preliminary viewing and selecting acts and items recommended by local organisations. All manner of programmes were shown in this incredibly busy theatre. But mainly they were theatrical concerts by amateur art groups from various branches of building, industry, and agriculture. Hundreds of performers took part in each programme: choirs, orchestras, dance ensembles, and soloists in all genres.

Okhlopkov's main aim in preparing the theatre's first programme was to stress the importance of the creative links between professional and amateur art. "I must mention my excitement and delight at being entrusted with the artistic direction of the Theatre of Folk Art," he wrote in the newspaper *Vechernyaya Moskva*.

The theatre's première impressed everyone by its size (about one thousand performers). The prologue for the first production was written by the well-known poet Mikhail Svetlov.

Okhlopkov introduced combined choirs, orchestras, and dance ensembles, opening the production with a carnival procession of performers through the auditorium.

The choir was accompanied by the composers of the works being performed—Sergei Prokofiev and Zinovy Kompanevets. The acts and items were introduced by People's Artists V. Pashennaya and Y. Lyubimov-Lansky. They presented to the audience metro builders: the singer L. Vinogradova and the family of the blacksmith V. Kazibeyev, who performed some Gypsy dances, V. Tyuleneva, a Tula factory worker, and L. Grigoryan, a worker at the Shaumyan production artel, A. Gulyaeva, a quality inspector at an electric bulb factory, and V. Kostomarova, a technician at the Mendeleyev Institute. Ensembles alternated with soloists. Singers were followed by dancers, reciters, and acrobats who in their performances combined the ingenuousness of the amateur with the skill of the professional.

Okhlopkov added his "personal touch" to each act and item. Out of the individual items he created a carnival-like spectacle, full of dynamism, life and colour. It was like a firework display, thrilling the spectator by its rich variety of talent. Real diamonds had got into the hands of the producer, ballet master and musical advisers, and the work of the professional artists who collaborated with them can be compared only to that of a cutter of precious stones.

Igor Moiseyev literally performed miracles with the amateur dancers. Incidentally, it was his work as ballet master at the Theatre of Folk Art that gave him the idea of creating the Folk Dance Company which subsequently won world-wide fame.

Unfortunately Okhlopkov's association with the Theatre of Folk Art was a short one.

The early years of the war saw Okhlopkov working in Omsk, in the Vakhtangov Theatre. Here he put on two productions: Vladimir Solovyov's *Field Marshal Kutuzov* and Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac.*

The first production provoked serious disagreement between the producer and the author of the play who protested at the slightest deviation from what he had intended. In the heat of the dispute Okhlopkov called the play a "general's" one, which explained the victory over Napoleon's army only by the military genius of Kutuzov. The producer aimed at showing, first and foremost, that the victory in the 1812 war was the result of the fervent patriotism of the people....

In the summer of 1943, when the front line had moved away from Moscow and the nazi invaders were suffering one defeat after another, the Moscow theatres gradually began to return from evacuation. One of the first to be brought back to Moscow was the Theatre of the Revolution, which had been in Tashkent. It was decided to merge its troupe with that of the Moscow Drama Theatre which had remained in Moscow.

Maxim Shtraukh came to Moscow at the request of the Theatre of the Revolution troupe and invited me to be director of the theatre, informing me that Okhlopkov had consented to be artistic director. Soon afterwards I was appointed director of the Theatre of the Revolution and received instructions to bring the troupe from Tashkent to Moscow.

Okhlopkov stayed in the capital at this time and prepared to meet the theatre with concrete plans. It had been decided to make use, until the end of the year, of the repertoires built up by the Theatre of the Revolution and the Moscow Drama Theatre, and also to work on new plays under the direction of Okhlopkov. Our meeting was a friendly one. Considerable difficulties lay ahead, particularly in connection with the merging of two troupes: the Moscow Drama Theatre, which was acting on the stage of the Theatre of the Revolution, and the original occupants of the theatre in Hertzen Street who had temporarily left their premises during the evacuation.

Okhlopkov handled the question of merging the troupes extremely tactfully. He studied the repertoires of both theatres with great care. He had known the actors of the Theatre of the Revolution well before and worked with many of them in the Meyerhold Theatre. In the Moscow Drama Theatre he immediately "noted" the young

actress V. Orlova, as well as V. Lyubimov, L. Orlova, K. Polovikova and S. Vecheslov.

At the same time he considered it essential to bring new names into the troupe. F. Ranevskaya, Y. Samoilov, L. Sverdlin and S. Kayukov were invited to join it.

At a meeting of the troupe in the autumn of 1943 Okhlopkov presented the proposed repertoire for the coming year.

The first production on which he began work was Victor Gusev's dramatic poem *Sons of Three Rivers.*

This production became, as it were, Okhlopkov's initial claim to the development of the new trend in the theatre — his search for the drama of philosophical generalisation and the poetic expression of reality. Gusev's dramatic poem is about the fates of the "sons of three rivers". The rivers appear in the poem as symbols of the people's tragedy, the conflict of high ideals with the black forces of fascism.

Like many of Okhlopkov's productions, this première had both enthusiastic admirers and bitter opponents. But everyone recognised the producer's talent.

At the same time the theatre was working on a new play by Pogodin called *The Boatwoman* about the heroic events of the Battle of Stalingrad. This play is not one of Pogodin's best. Okhlopkov realised its defects, but nevertheless decided to take the risk, attracted by the idea of producing a "show on water".

It is difficult to describe what the management and the production department went through to satisfy the requirements of the producer and the artist.

The water on the stage gave the spectacle an unusual theatricality. No lighting could have produced such effects as those which the artist achieved by using the play of light reflected on the water's surface. The first night was in August and it provoked much dispute. Okhlopkov himself thought that the production should be taken off unless the text was revised by the author. It took the courage of a real artist to admit one's mistake so resolutely.

To my shame I must confess that I did not support the chief producer at this difficult moment and insisted that the production be kept in the repertoire with only a few minor amendments. I could not forget the vast sums which had been spent on it and overlooked the fact that matters of principle must not be sacrificed for financial considerations.

Okhlopkov faced many difficult tasks in his first season with the theatre, above all in connection with the repertoire. As demanding as ever in his choice of plays from the ideological standpoint, he felt

Producer Nikolai Okhlopkov.
Cartoon by I. Igin

that all members of the troupe should be engaged in the productions, and the creative capacities and requirements of each actor should be taken into consideration. He knew that if the actors were not sufficiently occupied with creative work this could have serious consequences and demoralise them.

Creative and organisational questions are closely linked in the complex organism of a theatre. Okhlopkov could not help being worried by administrative troubles which distracted him from his creative work. He could not conceive of the theatre without Shakespeare's plays. The failure of the production of *Othello* at the Realistic Theatre did not deter him. Naturally he realised that to produce Shakespeare one needed not only time but also mature artistry. He hoped that Kozintsev would be able to complete the production in May 1946. His hopes were shattered, however, for Kozintsev was prevented from accepting the offer because of work with Lenfilm Studios. In January 1945 Okhlopkov went into the country outside Moscow to start work on *Hamlet.* But he did not manage to put it on until 1954.

He and I parted company much earlier. In February 1945 I left for the First Ukrainian Front on a commission from the Arts

Committee and returned to Moscow when the victory salute was being fired in the capital.

My relationship with Okhlopkov had become somewhat strained by the time I left. He resented any objection and did not recognise "diarchy". He demanded that his word be final in all questions concerning the life of the theatre—artistic, organisational and administrative. From the actors he demanded faith in his conception of the production and soon lost interest in those who, he sensed, did not have complete confidence in his producing skill. He possessed the ability to charm actors, but was not always constant in his affection for them. Does this mean he rejected everything that actors found for themselves in the process of their work on a role? No, of course not.

Leafing through the pages of the past I remember my work with Okhlopkov as a happy time in my life, in spite of all my chagrin at his complex character which I did not manage to understand in time.

EVERYTHING IS LEFT TO THE PEOPLE

The country cottage where Nikolai Cherkasov lived, in the village of Komarovo on the railway line to Finland, was situated on the edge of a steep slope which ran down to the stretch of forest along the Gulf of Finland.

It stood in the middle of a large plot of land, barely visible among the trees.

For some reason most of the streets in the village, which was called after V. Komarov, President of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, had military names. One side of Cherkasov's cottage faced Artillery Street. Next door was the Writers' Club, about which Cherkasov made some rather caustic remarks:

"Well, they always say the most surprising things are right next to you. I would personally be most surprised if a good new play for our theatre were born next door. No signs of one yet."

A little farther off, next to the railway line, is a recently constructed two-storey building in modern style. This is the holiday home of the All-Russia Theatre Society. The grounds of the house and the little wooden cottage which is still standing once belonged to the outstanding actress Y. Korchagina-Alexandrovskaya, beloved by the Leningraders and nicknamed Aunty Katya. She bequeathed her dacha to her colleagues in the theatre.

"They call the actors' holiday home 'Anna Karenina's Home' because it's so close to the railway," joked Cherkasov. "Before you know where you are, you're under a train."

I visited Cherkasov in August 1966, shortly before his untimely demise. I announced my arrival in advance by telephone. The actor's wife met me by the gate and led me onto a glass veranda with old wicker furniture. The modern ceramics, selected with great taste, harmonised beautifully with it. The landing by the porch was paved with a stone mosaic showing a highly conventionalised portrait of the master of the house and his dog. This composition turned out to be the work of my old acquaintance Semyon Mandel, that fine theatre and cinema artist.

Shortly before my visit to Komarovo I had been to Leningrad and met Cherkasov by chance at the Stanislavsky Palace of Arts. He was chairing a meeting of the Presidium of the Leningrad branch of the All-Russia Theatre Society. He had just got over a severe illness and spent some time in the Kuntsevo Hospital in Moscow. The lung disease had left its mark on his appearance. He looked awful. In spite of the course of treatment he had taken, he was still very short-winded. Instead of the cheerful, energetic Cherkasov whom we were used to seeing, here was an emaciated, aged, and incredibly tired man with dull eyes. The meeting had just finished, and Cherkasov was hurrying home, but seeing me in the vestibule, he took me to the round foyer on the first floor and began to ask me about "news from the capital" and what impression his broadcast on Leningrad television at the end of July had made in Moscow.

"You can't imagine what an effort it took to go in front of the cameras. I found the few words I had to say that day more difficult than acting a large part in a play quite recently."

The Leningrad theatre critic V. Ivanova, who took part in the broadcast together with Cherkasov at the television studio, said:

"It was terribly hot in Leningrad. Cherkasov did not feel well and could not go in front of the cameras straightaway. The broadcast went on against a background of tension. We were all afraid that the viewers would not be able to see Cherkasov himself. Extracts from films and photographs of Cherkasov in various parts had been used to illustrate his acting skill. Nobody knew when we could ask Cherkasov to speak to the viewers. It was only towards the very end of the broadcast that I heard behind me the quietly spoken words: 'Shall I say "hello" to the viewers now?' I saw a young, slim, completely transformed Cherkasov, who seemed to have shaken off all external traces of his illness. He walked lightly across the stage and spoke easily and freely, without a trace of breathlessness. It was

Nikolai Cherkasov

only after he had finished and said goodbye to the viewers that we all saw how unwell he was after this splendid, two-minute performance, inspired by his strong sense of responsibility to his audience. What a strain those few words were for him, and what an effort of will they required!"

He and I agreed that I would visit him at his country house in Komarovo, where I was intending to spend a holiday at the above-mentioned "Karenina's home".

And so the meeting took place. Cherkasov was feeling much better. He came out on the veranda in a dark, elegant shirt, looking younger and fresher. And immediately began to talk with his former spirit and verve.

A few days before our meeting the Pushkin Drama Theatre in Leningrad had lost its "patriarch", the actor and chief producer L. Vivien.

Cherkasov was obviously upset and angry.

"We haven't learnt to take care of the older generation in literature, science and the arts. They are a really hard-working generation, which has gone through a great deal. People think that actors after sixty are tough people who can stand up to anything. I can't help getting annoyed when I see the devilish burden being carried by the older generation of actors: take, for example, our Leningraders—Simonov, Tolubevev and Merkurvev, Muscovites—Zavadsky, Ruben Simonov, Toporkov, Zharov and Vladislavsky. Unfortunately nobody has made a serious study of the specific features of our profession, the nervous strain which an actor experiences in the process of creation. Many people think that all this comes naturally, that acting on the stage is as easy as pie. But they should take an electric cardiogram of us actors after each performance. How often you have to act on the stage when you are run-down or ill, just because a performance is the collective responsibility of the actors engaged in it. Sometimes an actor has no understudy, and the play can't go on!

"How often I catch myself with those inner contradictions so typical of most actors. On the one hand, pressing urge to act on the stage, to create something new, and on the other, an equally pressing need to rest. This is particularly obvious when you are working in the cinema. Nothing wears an actor out as much as filming. As a young man I did not know the meaning of tiredness. I did not realise how our profession wore us out. Shchukin, Khmelyov and Dobronravov did not realise either—and departed before their time, because they overestimated their strength. I was recently invited to move to

Moscow and run the All-Russia Theatre Society after Alexandra Yablochkina died. They even 'guaranteed' that I would also live to be a hundred! But Yablochkina was a unique phenomenon. I almost agreed, and then thought that Mikhail Tsaryov, with his rational mind and brilliant organising ability, would be much more capable of running this on a national scale. I have my hands full as it is, being the president of the Leningrad branch of the Society."

Our talk turned to reminiscences about the past. I lived in Leningrad in the 1920s and often met Cherkasov in most diverse circumstances. He became animated again.

"As an old Leningrader you must remember our young days, don't you? The beginning of my career? In the 1920s I did an act with Kleiman, Beryozov and Chirkov.... Do you remember what a racket we made with our number Pat, Patashon and Chaplin? People praised us and said that it was interesting, talented, they predicted the eccentric, comic actor.... But you can't imagine how slack that variety work made me as an actor. And how difficult it was later to pull myself together in the theatre and make myself work hard without external devices and cheap effects. This turning point came thanks to the high culture and exactingness of Alexander Bryantsev, when I was working in the Young Spectator's Theatre in Leningrad, and particularly in the Pushkin Theatre which Boris Sushkevich joined with his profound knowledge of Stanislavsky's system. How often I recall too my first teacher Vladimir Maximov. Long ago at the Institute of Scenic Arts, he warned me of the temptations of easy success on the variety stage."

Cherkasov began some fascinating stories about Maximov, one of the stars of the Russian pre-revolutionary cinema.

The name of Vladimir Maximov was linked with our youth, with the first unforgettable impressions of the Russian cinema.

Shortly before the First World War the first films of the Russian Golden Series were released, including the screen version of one of Verbitskaya's best-selling novel *The Keys of Happiness*. Both the novel itself and the attempt to transfer it to the screen were obviously intended to pander to the tastes of the philistine public, with which this Russian best-seller was extremely popular. Maximov with his immaculate appearance, and aristocratic manners immediately became the idol of cinema-goers who longed to see, if only on the screen, the "high life" of the rich. In the Russian cinema Maximov became a star on a par with Ivan Moszhukhin and Vera Kholodnaya.

But unlike the latter Maximov always held a leading position on the stage, working at the beginning of the century in the Moscow Art Theatre, the Maly, and Senelnikov's troupe. In the early years of the Revolution he took part in setting up in Petrograd the heroico-romantic Bolshoi Drama Theatre which had Gorky, Blok and Lunacharsky at its cradle. Together with those fine Petrograd actors, Monakhov, Lavrentyev, and Yuryev, he built this theatre, which began in the Large Hall of the Conservatoire and later moved to the premises of the former Suvorin Theatre on Fontanka. It was in this theatre that Maximov created the characters of Don Carlos, Karl Moor and Antonio in the tragedies by Schiller and Shakespeare. Yes, Cherkasov was undoubtedly fortunate in his teachers. And even the fact that Maximov, Bryantsev and Sushkevich in the theatre, and Eisenstein in the cinema, were completely different and original artists evidently also enriched Cherkasov. As a person endowed with talent, intelligence and incredible industry, he was able to find in each of his teachers the "rational kernel" and borrow all that was best in what they taught their pupils.

Cherkasov's professional life was always linked with his activities as a public figure. His last appearance in the film *Everything Is Left to the People* has a symbolic ring about it and actually completes the gallery of eminent Russian scientists acted by him on the screen: Timiryazev, Michurin and Popov. Here is the last one, a generalised portrayal of Academician Dronov, who absorbed, as it were, all the finest traits of the progressive Russian intelligentsia of which Nikolai Cherkasov himself was a striking representative.

The actor was invariably attracted by the characters of real people prominent in Russian culture. It was he who created the powerful personalities of Stasov and Gorky on the screen. He found inspiration and professional fulfilment in the history of the Russian state, which can be seen from his portrayal of Alexander Nevsky and the Tsarevich Alexei.

Cherkasov experienced considerable difficulty and disappointment in his work on the role of Ivan the Terrible, a complex personality who is just as contradictory as the many historical interpretations of this powerful and tragic figure in Russian history. As we know, the work of the outstanding Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein on the second part of *Ivan the Terrible* was severely criticised.

This unfavourable assessment of the second part was a hard blow for Cherkasov too, particularly if one takes into account the successful beginning of the work.

Sergei Eisenstein

It was filmed in Alma Ata at a difficult time—during the Great Patriotic War. The scenario covered twenty years in the life of the great ruler—from his coronation to his proclamation of himself as "tsar of all Russia".

The first part of the film was highly appraised by the audiences not only here but also in other countries. It depicted the struggle of the young Ivan IV against the feudal boyars, the reforms aimed at uniting Russia and turning it into a powerful state. The film also showed the capture of Kazan and Astrakhan.

Soon after the end of the Great Patriotic War I happened to read a letter from the well-known Russian actor Mikhail Chekhov who had emigrated. It was addressed to those who made the film *Ivan the Terrible* and acted in it.

In my talk with Cherkasov I asked his opinion of this letter and reminded him of Chekhov's critical comments about the actors in the film. I had kept a copy of Chekhov's letter to the makers of *Ivan the Terrible.*

Cherkasov smiled, went inside for a couple of minutes, and returned with a typewritten copy of Chekhov's letter of 31 May, 1945.

"What can I say about this? Mikhail Chekhov was an outstanding actor, of course. You and I saw his incredible transformations. Just think: Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* and Eric XIV, Khlestakov and Hamlet. I think the 1920s saw the greatest flowering of his talent. I did not see him as Ivan the Terrible whom he acted in A. Tolstoy's tragedy in Riga—that was in the 1930s. But the very fact that he worked on this role casts doubt on the objectivity of his judgement of attempts by other actors to create the same character but from a fundamentally different standpoint. He accuses us of making 'Moscow Art Theatre pauses' in the cinema. But he himself abused pauses dreadfully. Of course, he does not notice his own acting faults. True, the general tone of the letter is extremely friendly, and it also contains some interesting and useful ideas.

"Listen to what he writes:

"'In Eisenstein's idea there is much fire and strength, which exceed by far the psychology of everyday life. He has conceived a tragedy of Shakespearian dimensions. And this is how it comes over to us *visually.* The form is set by the director, it delights us but leaves us cold. The question arises as to whether the Russian actor has these Shakespearian-Eisenstein feelings, fire and passions.

"'Of course, he does. Let me say it again: no other actor in the world has such strong, passionate, and exciting feelings as the Russian actor. But they have to be revealed; an actor has to learn how

Mikhail Chekhov

to evoke them in himself at will, he has to train great feelings in order to become a tragic actor. How can this be done? Firstly, by removing the obstacles which prevent their manifestation, and, secondly, by using the correct methods to arouse the feelings necessary for tragedy.

"'Perhaps my impression is wrong, but it is as follows: in pausing between words you think that these pauses will impress the audience with the feeling which your character is supposed to be experiencing at the moment in question. Perhaps, you expect semi-consciously that in this silent, tense moment (1/2 second) the feeling will be kindled in you yourself and you will convey it to the audience in the next word? Perhaps, finally, you hope (again without fully realising it) that the feeling will be kindled in the audience in this fraction of a second. But the reverse happens: owing to these delays the audience cools down, grows indifferent and you have to try and win its attention over and over again....

"'This type of speech is harmful not only to the actor, but also to the producer: it deprives him of one of the most effective means of expression—the pause!

"'Tempo is a difficult problem these days. The Russian actor must

not learn the tempo of American films. In the American film it is *haste*, not tempo. For the most part, the director and actor use it to conceal the emptiness and dullness of what is taking place on the screen. (I except, naturally, the few films of great importance.) The actors here are afraid of keeping silent even for half a second: it might reveal a total void; you must talk and talk as quickly as possible. This is not tempo.... Real tempo depends on two conditions: the first is the removal of unnecessary prolixities (in speech, acting and production), and the second is the actor's vital, mobile feeling. There are two kinds of tempo: outer and inner. The first is expressed in the rapid or slow alternation of the external means of expression used by the actor and producer or director (movement, speech, mises-en-scène, montage, all manner of stage effects, etc.). The inner tempo is expressed in the rapid or slow alternation of emotional states of the character portrayed by you on the stage. Whereas the first type of tempo (outer) can be achieved by the director through purely production means, the montage devices, the second type (inner) tempo depends entirely on the actor. It is this, and not "American" tempo, that the Russian actor must learn: the rapid, yet precise alternation of images, desires, feelings and emotions of all kinds. I should note, incidentally, that inner and outer tempo do not always coincide in acting.... This frequently produces remarkably unexpected and powerful effects, but that is a matter for the director or producer....'"

Cherkasov stopped reading Chekhov's letter, thought for a moment and said:

"It's a long time since I read this letter. In many respects Chekhov is right. He is right that *in our days time is moving faster.* We feel, think and walk faster than ten or fifteen years ago. Our audience also watches and understands what is taking place on the screen 'faster'. Chekhov is also right in assuming that people in the age of Ivan the Terrible thought, spoke and moved more heavily and slowly: that this was, so to say, their 'manner' of life. He is right too that a modern audience is no longer able to bear this 'historical truth', and that this quality of the age must be depicted by hints and characteristic features, not by copying 'historical truth'.

"Yes, the Soviet theatre-goer is not the pre-revolutionary civil servant visiting the St. Petersburg Alexandrinsky Theatre, about whom Nekrasov wrote:

> *Fed up with card-games, once a week or so*
> *From boredom, to the Alexandrinsky Theatre*
> *Our honourable hero used to go.*

At twice the price, a benefit performance
He'd book for to promote the nation's art,
Although he deemed the calling of an actor
Disgraceful, by tradition, in his heart.
He loved a bloody plot with lots of shooting
Where vice is duly punished in the end.
While relishing a spicy couplet's beauty
He'd poke his wife: now that's the stuff, my friend!
'Twixt acts he'd whisper to a portly lady
(Smart Petersburg will teach you more than this)
That drama calls for movement and passion,
That Shakespeare was a brilliant dramatist.
However, he was not so sure of it,
And in an hour would claim the opposite.

"True, in his letter Chekhov also states that 'passion and movement are necessary in drama '. But this is not the main point. The main thing is to find the key to the character, image, embodied on stage or screen. When I am acting on the stage the auditorium, the reaction of the audience, is the mirror which reflects my acting. It is difficult, almost impossible, for me to see my mistakes. But on the screen I can watch myself and make a far more profound analysis of my behaviour, success and failure.

"You know the misfortune which befell the second part of *Ivan the Terrible.* It was not 'pauses' which caused it, but an historically incorrect portrayal of the character of Ivan the Terrible as a weak-willed, irresolute, spineless person. The makers of the film were given ample opportunity to revise the second part, but they did not manage to do so because of the early death of Sergei Eisenstein. And the attempt to 'put the film right' with the help of director V. Petrov was not successful. This is all the more surprising because when I was working on the same character, Ivan IV, in V. Solovyov's *The Great Sovereign* at the Leningrad Pushkin Theatre, I chose a completely different approach to the role, guided by the words of Belinsky who called Ivan 'an energetic, profound and gigantic soul'. One of my aims was to give a clear and convincing portrayal of Ivan the Terrible's bravery, his struggle against internal and external foes for the high ideal of consolidating the state. This basic *ideological* aspect of the treatment of the role is totally ignored by Mikhail Chekhov in his letter. Which is quite understandable. These questions are alien to him. It is much more in his line to make a narrow professional analysis of a play or film. But, after beginning

his letter with criticism, he pays tribute in it not only to Eisenstein's work, but to our cinema as a whole:

"'I have allowed myself to go into such professional details because your production and acting, accompanied by Prokofiev's music, greatly impressed and excited me. You, Russian actors and directors, were the first to lead the film along the path to great art worthy of our time. There is no doubt that your work will frighten the countries west of you by its novelty and boldness. You will hear much criticism, just and unjust. But there is nothing terrible in this; you know all about fighting. Only one thing is terrible: *mistakes in the actual process of your creation.* It is easier for me, a representative of your profession and at the same time an objective spectator, to see them at a distance than for you yourselves. My desire or, rather, hope to be of use to you was my only motive in writing these lines. For your bold experiments, quests and honesty in your work you deserve profound gratitude. You are in privileged position: you are unacquainted with commercial films, where "business" is everything, where the word "art" is replaced by the word "trade". But you are worthy of your position, for you use it as pioneers: for the progress of others. A new word will go forth from you, and you, and no one else, will give the West a lesson of authenticity in art and drive "business" out of its sphere.'

"Charlie Chaplin," Cherkasov continued, "accepted the first part of *Ivan the Terrible* completely, 'without reservations'. After seeing it he sent a telegram saying that *Ivan the Terrible* is a great patriotic film. Its atmosphere is splendid, and its beauty surpasses anything seen up till now in the cinema."

I knew Cherkasov for many years, having met him in the days of our youth. I remember him as a lanky, lively student at the Institute of Scenic Arts. He rose to great popularity before my eyes. Fame came to him first with the incredibly virtuoso dance-pantomime, Pat, Patashon and Chaplin, in which Cherkasov was the central figure. His comic Pat, who seemed to have stepped down from the screen to the variety stage, amazed audiences by his remarkable agility and trick movements which seemed almost superhuman. There is a circus act called "the rubber man". The performer ties himself into knots and touches his heels with his head: it looks as though his back will snap at any moment. Cherkasov's arms seemed to be made of rubber, when he wrapped them round his body and managed to clasp them in a friendly handshake behind his back. His legs cut

fantastic capers, as if they were about to fly off in all directions. He somehow managed to twine the left leg round the right.

The fondness for eccentric circus acts appeared in Cherkasov at an early age when he began work as an extra in the Petrograd Opera Theatre, the former Mariinsky Theatre. They gladly took him on as an extra, mostly because of his great height and striking appearance. He was particularly thin then, in the hungry year of 1919. Chaliapin happened to catch sight of him and remarked ironically:

"Want to become an opera singer, eh, young man? You won't make it! Your health won't permit it!"

In Komarovo Cherkasov told me that he was writing his reminiscences about Chaliapin.

"I must write about Chaliapin by all means. I watched him and he will remain in my memory as long as I live. And I am convinced about his divided loyalties after he went abroad. He could not help being tormented and cursing himself at times for his precipitate action. The true Russian was bound to awake in him, for the whole nature of his art was *deeply national.* Mikhail Chekhov, that talented, but unhappy nephew of Anton Chekhov, also suffered without his native land and watched carefully, sometimes even jealously, the development of our art. His letter about *Ivan the Terrible* bears traces of this love and jealousy. I feel and understand that one must not only talk, but also write about all of this. Am I thinking of writing my memoirs? No, that goes against the grain: who drank what? Coffee or tea? No, thank you. It's a waste of time. It's quite enough to have written the book *An Actor's Notes.* Incidentally, it has been translated into some foreign languages and published abroad as well as here. If I'm to write now it must be about others, not about myself. I have just completed my reminiscences about Bulgakov. But if I'm to write about *myself* it will be about my failures as an actor and my dreams which have not come true. I dreamt of acting Küchelbecker for example. Yuri Tynyanov even wrote a play for me called *Küchlya.* Vsevolod Meyerhold was to have produced it, but, unfortunately, he did not manage to in time.... Many remember the 1930s as a period of complex internal politics. But no one can deny the remarkable flowering of the arts at that time.

"I think this was largely due to the strong influence on literature, drama, and art of such giants of culture as Gorky and Mayakovsky. And also a set of talented playwrights: Afinogenov, Kirshon, Pogodin, Bulgakov, Shkvarkin and many others. The method of socialist realism plus talent. Without talent no method can help! But something else is also needed to nourish talent — a constant link with

life, public activities. Of course, the work of the writer, actor and painter is in itself a form of public activity, if it is charged with high ideals which help to educate people in the spirit of a socialist society. For our profession it is particularly important not simply to observe, but to study human life. Nothing helps in this more than personal participation in public activities.

"I sometimes hear my comrades say that they have no time to devote to their own profession because of their numerous public and Party duties. That's all nonsense! My work as deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR takes up quite a lot of time, but it enriches me professionally, it helps me to study people, it makes me take a much broader and more profound interest in questions of government, understand the life of the country as a whole, and study the international situation."

LESNOYE

The first actor whom I happened to know not only on the stage but also in real life was the famous operetta comic Grigory Yaron. For me he was the "high priest of Melpomene" whom I could rightly regard not only as a friend of long standing, but also as my "godfather" in the sphere of the theatre. I was only twelve years old at the time....

Today, half a century later, I have before me a book written by Yaron about the art of the operetta to which he devoted his whole professional life. Yaron sent me his book *My Favourite Genre* in 1960 with the friendly inscription, reminding me of my visits to the Young Theatre in Lesnoye, where operettas were also presented (in 1915).

The operetta belongs to the so-called "light genre". But this seeming "ease" is achieved by work which is far from easy. This was what made Yaron take his profession extremely seriously. In the sphere of the operetta he was not only an actor and producer, but also a researcher of great erudition. He had a perfect knowledge of the genre in all its varieties — from classical musical comedy to Viennese operetta.

At the beginning of his professional career Yaron joined the troupe of the Young Theatre which had opened in small, newly built premises in the Petrograd suburb of Lesnoye.

I spent my childhood in this township situated in a stretch of forest from Vyborgskaya Storona to Ozerki.

In summer, Lesnoye filled up with holidaymakers who could not afford the aristocratic suburbs of Detskoye Selo, Old and New Peterhof, Strelna and Sestroretsk.

In winter too it was very lively here. From autumn to spring Lesnoye was like a student town. Here, on a street called the Road to Sosnovka were the various buildings of the Polytechnic Institute founded at the beginning of the century. On the other side of the township, nearer to the city, was the Forestry Institute surrounded by a shady park.

In winter, on Sundays and holidays, Lesnoye was inundated by St. Petersburgers who had come to ski.

You could often see Alexander Blok, Sergei Gorodetsky, Dmitry Tsenzor and Sasha Chorny in a small shop which hired out Finnish skis in Second Murinsky Prospekt. They came here with crowds of actors, writers and poets. The noisy band, wearing sports sweaters, hand-knitted caps and pointed ski-boots, was setting off for a skiing trip.

A special type of sledging was extremely popular during Shrovetide. The horse-drawn sledges were decorated with coloured ribbons, and bells. Their owners, mostly Finns, issued invitations in piercing voices:

"Sirty kopecks an hour! Sirty kopecks!"

For these thirty kopecks you could speed along in a light sledge drawn by a nimble horse. Large parties could hire *rozvalni*, low, wide sledges, drawn by a pair of horses and covered with a rug or matting on hey or straw. It was customary to simply pile into them. The sledge owners stayed in a tea-house during the ride, leaving the hirers in full charge.

The house to which my mother and her three children moved after my father's death was an unattractive, two-storey log cabin crowded with inhabitants. The only item of interest were the people who lived in the outer wing facing the prospekt. There were the famous liberal Professor Pyotr Struve and his large family, including the little Gleb who is now earning his living in the United States as an American "specialist" on Russian literature.

We, children, rarely saw Professor Struve. Occasionally, returning with my mother from St. Petersburg to Lesnoye, I met him in a carriage drawn by a steam-engine and could not tear my eyes away from the imposing figure and red beard. He had the habit of not raising his eyelids. When I asked mother: "Why is Uncle Struve asleep?" she answered in a significant whisper:

"Be quiet, lad. The Professor isn't asleep, he's thinking."

Grigory Yaron

I do not know, of course, what the Professor was thinking about. Perhaps he was reflecting on a new revision of Marxism, or his future ministerial career, or his children's future?

Let us return to the theatre, however.

A theatrical atmosphere pervaded Lesnoye, with its winter Young Theatre and summer garden bearing the poetic name of Silver Pond. The giants of Russian drama, Varlamov and Davydov, came here on guest tours. The finest singers of the imperial stage sang in Lesnoye, and the first Russian films were shot here starring the comedian "Uncle Pud".

It was here that I first had the honour of appearing in a children's amateur performance of *Cinderella* with my name printed on the poster. I was convinced that when the producer Y. Milyukova heard me recite Merezhkovsky's *Sakia Muni* at the auditions I would immediately be offered the main role of the Prince.

In order to captivate the producer totally I howled through the hall the last four lines of the poem with all my might.

The howling was to no avail, alas, and I had to be content with the

almost silent role of a servant with the traditional words: "The carriage is waiting!"

When I complained about the injustice of fate to Yaron he exclaimed:

"Don't be sad, my friend! Remember Schiller's words: 'There are no bad roles for good actors.'"

And now I am leafing again through Yaron's book, rereading his reminiscences about our first meeting in Lesnoye: "I recall that one day after a rehearsal a small grammar-school boy of about thirteen or fourteen came up to me in the street and said that he dreamt of the stage, that he was not allowed to go to a theatre where operetta was being shown, and therefore he asked me to take him in with me sometimes through the stage door. The boy was a fine lad (from Yaron's point of view! — *B. F.*). Not so long ago I had been slipping furtively into the operetta theatre myself, so I simpathised with him with all my heart. In brief, he became a constant visitor and watched almost all the shows from the wings. He and I became great friends, and to this very day we often meet and are still close friends. He is the long-standing director of the Central Art Workers' Club — B. M. Filippov."

Yaron was a regular performer at club concerts and a keen organiser of many *kapoustniks*. He directed comic orchestras which included such famous Soviet musicians as Emil Gilels, Yakov Flière, Arnold Kaplan, David Oistrakh and others. He performed duets in strange combinations — sometimes with Ivan Kozlovsky or Olga Lepeshinskaya.

And, finally, he gave some interesting and informative talks on his favourite genre, amazing audiences by his theoretical knowledge.

One of Yaron's distinguishing features was his never slackening desire to learn and augment his knowledge. Lectures on the theatre were a fairly common phenomenon in our club. They were not always on a sufficiently high level. One day Yaron, infuriated by the ignorance of a speaker, brought me a list of quotations from the latter's latest lecture on the peculiarities of the art of the theatre.

"Just look what he tried to foist on us! You wouldn't find such pearls even in an operetta libretto. I have recorded these 'scientific' discoveries:

"'The word *theatre* is a synonym which does not mean anything in itself.'

"'The Greek theatre had its celebrities and people without talent who irritated the public.'

"'The Roman circus was a circus of enjoyment.'

G. Yaron as Count Kutaisov in N. Strelnikov's operetta *The Serf Girl*

"'*The Irkutsk Story* is a melodrama which extorts tears and other accessories.'

"'The producer Pluchek in his productions makes use of the system of bourgeois master-keys.'

"Well," said Yaron indignantly, "what's the difference between this speaker and the pre-revolutionary reviewer who wrote: 'The actors played quite well, in spite of the sets.'"

In 1963 many old friends assembled at the Central Art Workers' Club — people prominent in literature and the arts, who had decided to celebrate what was for me not an entirely welcome date — my sixtieth birthday. Among those who made speeches on this far from historic occasion was my old friend Yaron, who announced from the platform that my visit in 1915 to the operetta *Harem Secrets*, in which he was performing, played a decisive role in my aesthetic education.

Well, even if that is not quite the case, in the kaleidoscope of memories accumulated over half a century, the Young Theatre will always remain for me the place where I first experienced the enthralling power of the art of the theatre. And the responsibility for this is due in no small measure to that splendid artist Grigory Yaron, who, alas, is no longer with us.

THE CREATOR OF A NEW GENRE

At the beginning of the 1930s the problems of the actor's profession were being discussed with special fervour in the theatre world. Stanislavsky's book *The Actor's Work on Himself* had not yet been written, but long before this he stated that "the artist of the stage must himself direct his inspiration and be able to summon it up when it is announced on the theatre bill".

Herein lies the main secret of the actor's art and the difference between it and the other arts, for "all other artists can create only when *inspiration visits them*".

From the very first days of our club we tried to delve into this secret of creation at our actors' evenings.

In November 1932 an outstanding Moscow actor Vladimir Yakhontov said during his evening in the club:

"We have a multitude of monographs, diaries and other writings by theatre people, but none of them answers the many questions about acting skill. Even Diderot with his theatrical paradoxes on the actor was no more than a brilliant dilettante. The best book about the actor's skill written up till now is Coquelin's, but it, too, as the great Stanislavsky has pointed out, is limited to separate ideas and advice. This is why the Sovremennik (Contemporary) Theatre in the person of the producer Y. Popova and myself is trying to affirm *our* understanding of the art of the theatre and acting methodology, which is questionable for many of us.

"We are now starting work on the large canvas of *Karl Marx, Doctor of Philosophy*. The study of this great philosopher and revolutionary should be professional must for all workers in the arts. The theme of

Marx and his age should be included in some form in theatres' work plans, and the study of his theory should be as necessary a requirement as bread, water and physical exercises."

The *Contemporary*.... Pushkin, Nekrasov and Chernyshevsky were all attracted by this word. It also fascinated Yakhontov as the most accurate expression of the hopes and aspirations of the progressive Russian intelligentsia, which always kept pace with its age and its people. It was recently resurrected in a new theatre in Moscow, whose productions are very popular with theatre-goers.

One cannot imagine Yakhontov *outside politics and literature.*

The radio and sound cinema have only partially recorded his fine art. Today his remarkable voice, his striking intonation can still be heard on the radio, conveying the meaning of works profoundly and subtly. We are still enchanted by the variety of tone which he used, lending different shades to his performance — from light irony to intense drama.

"My first work," said Yakhontov at the above-mentioned club evening, "is the composition entitled *Lenin.* I shall recite from it Vladimir Ilyich's speech about the armed uprising. Watch how the character emerges here. It grows out of the deep inner conviction, the purposeful speech, the clear-cut gestures, the total absence of naturalistic detail apart from the cap which serves only as an attribute of the age."

This first work of Yakhontov's, which determined the course of his career, brought about our first meeting.

In 1925 Yakhontov, who was acting at the Meyerhold Theatre, came to Leningrad on a guest tour. One of the political education officers, Grigory Avlov, rang the arts department of the Leningrad Trade Union Council, where I worked, and said that he had been visited by a young "Meyerhold" actor, who had invented a new form of concert performance, a kind of "artistic report". He recited on the stage an original literary work which contained excerpts from the *Communist Manifesto,* statements by Lenin, and poems about Vladimir Ilyich and the Revolution. And it was extremely impressive:

"He recited it to a few of us in the Politprosvet (Political Education Department — *Ed.*) and if you like he could give a recital at the Palace of Labour, too, so that you could recommend his act to workers' clubs."

The next day I was visited by a slender, fair-haired young man with an attractive appearance. Yakhontov's attempt to explain the nature of his work was not successful. Either his complicated refined

Vladimir Yakhontov

way of speaking or the novelty of his performance prevented me from obtaining a clear idea of the new genre. It would not be convenient to ask him to demonstrate his work without an audience. We agreed that he would perform his composition for a Leningrad audience in the building workers' club near the opera and ballet theatre (now the Kirov Theatre). At that time the club was run by a passionate lover of the arts Sergei Repin. His surname often provoked witticisms connected with the famous artist Ilya Repin, all the more so because Sergei was a housepainter by profession who had been chosen by his trade union to run the building workers' club. He was driven crazy by silly questions — wasn't it he who had painted the famous Zaporozhye Cossacks writing a letter to the Turkish Sultan? And hadn't he done a life portrait of Ivan the Terrible killing his son? Yet Sergei Repin was a genuinely creative person.

He showed his worth as the founder of the young people's amateur theatre Stroika (Construction Project) which was extremely popular with Leningraders. He was also an excellent club organiser. He was passionately in love with the theatre and readily agreed to let Yakhontov use his stage.

Many young people were present at the preview of Yakhontov's work *Lenin*, mainly amateur artists and students.

The performance was a success, and Repin, who was always sympathetic to the new and young, did all he could to promote Yakhontov's première; he prepared a beautiful bouquet of flowers for him and publicly thanked him after the performance. After that Yakhontov always dropped into the Palace of Labour on his visits to Leningrad and frequently performed at workers' clubs and palaces of culture, particularly for builders.

In 1928 he became more firmly established in Leningrad. We often met in the Book House in Nevsky Prospekt, in the Priboi Publishing House where his composition "War on War" was printed and where I also had to go on literary business.

Later fate brought us together in Moscow. At the beginning of the 1930s the Moscow Theatre Workers' Club took over the task of organising Yakhontov's performances. This coincided with what was perhaps the most complicated and contradictory period in his life, a period of infatuations and disappointments, victories and defeats. He was particularly tormented by the "in-between" nature of his position. People in charge of theatres did not recognise his genre as a theatrical one, and concert organisers tried to direct him along the well-trodden paths of variety stereotypes.

The nature of my relations with Yakhontov in this period can be understood from his letters of more than thirty years ago, and also from a humorous literary composition performed by him at an evening to celebrate the third anniversary of the Theatre Workers' Club. Naturally this must be regarded only as a friendly greeting on the birthday of a good friend. I cherish the nine small, yellowed pages which he handed to me after performing his opus of congratulation with his customary skill on the club stage:

"1. Let us open the dictionary:

"Jubilee is a festival introduced into the Catholic Church by Pope Boniface to fill the coffers, which was accompanied by total absolution for all who prayed to God at the Church of St. Peter during two weeks and

"2. was held originally once a century with a splendid procession of cardinals led by the Pope.

"No, that doesn't suit me.
"What is a club then?

Club is a society whose members, usually of the same standing, assemble in fixed premises for certain

"3. aims, e.g., for playing cards and other pastimes. Originated in London more than four hundred years ago and considered Shakespeare and Jonson to be its members....

Well, that is more like it. Although before letting these celebrated card-players into our club we would have to relieve them of their pack!

"4. The river of time carries away in its current the deeds of man. Time flies. One might have said of our club, where actors meet to study the new art of dialectical thinking, in the words of Lucian:

"'teach him to cut stone properly, and
link the individual parts skilfully and
be a good sculptor, for he is capable
of such things and, as you know, has
a natural gift for them....'"

I am omitting those passages of Yakhontov's panegyric which are of a purely personal nature. They really did contain complete absolution for all the sins of the club and its director.

Soon afterwards Yakhontov arrived at the club, agitated and upset. Serious complications had arisen in his relations with the management of the State Association of Music, Variety and Circus

(GOMETs). The association was run by an experienced administrator A. Dankman, who gave preference to variety and circus rather than the philharmonic genres. The peak of his achievements in the late 1920s was the "Moscow Music Hall and Its Forty Girls".

Yakhontov, with his idea of the "one-man theatre," was a tiny drop in the GOMETs ocean. Nobody there was really interested in this new and largely experimental venture initiated by Yakhontov and his life-long companion Y. Popova, who combined the talent of a producer with a profound knowledge of literature. She was in the true sense of the word co-author of Yakhontov's works, and after his death became a producer of literary recitals.

The GOMETs administrators regarded Yakhontov as a crank in the arts. They did all they could to make him change to the traditional type of reciting and to use him in "mixed" concerts together with acrobats and jugglers. I myself heard them complaining about this restless "reciter-declaimer", as they called him ironically.

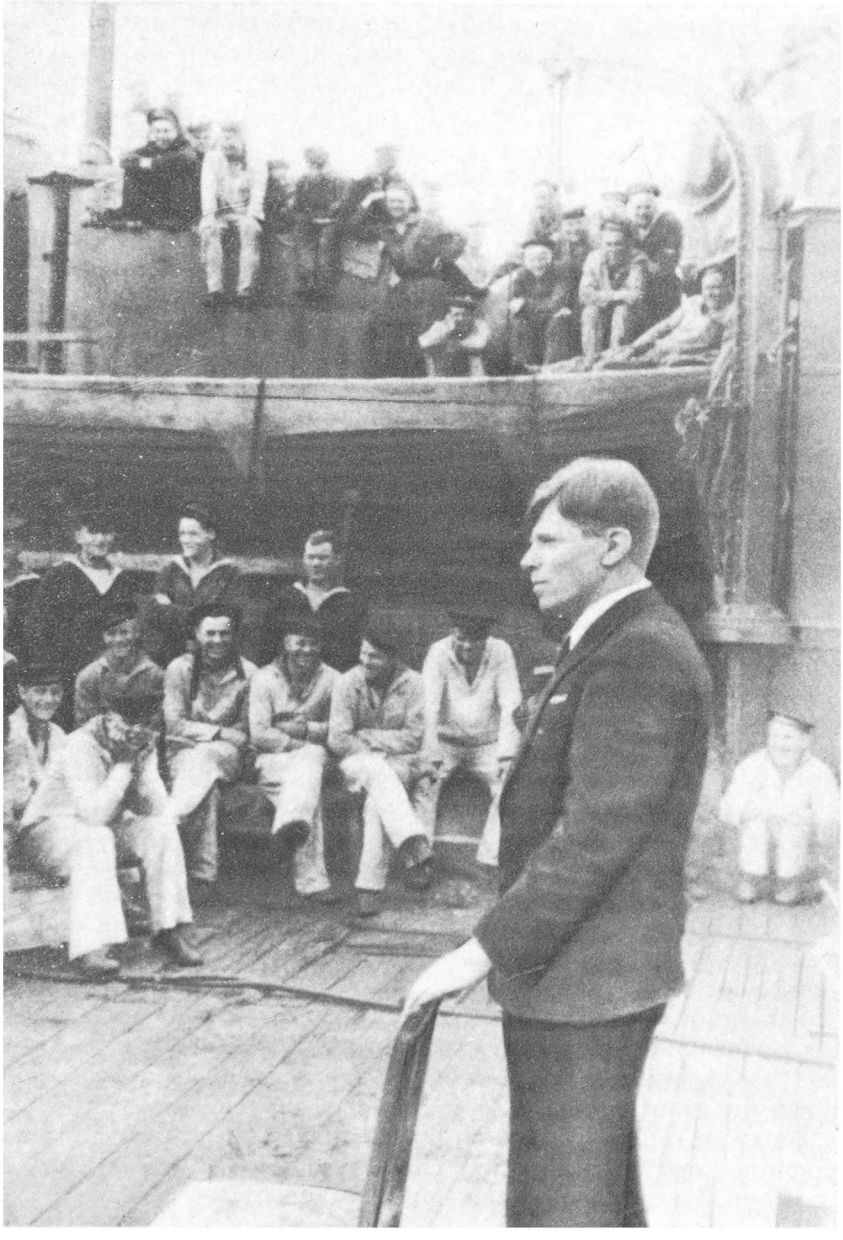
All this tormented Yakhontov and eventually made him decide to break away from GOMETs . At that time concert business was not yet concentrated in a single body, and Yakhontov chose the Theatre Workers' Club as a temporary refuge, which took over the organisation of his concerts in Moscow and outlying areas. Although his "one-man theatre" did not require cumbersome equipment—sets, costumes, or props, none of us realised what a job it was to manage a theatrical unit, even when its troupe consisted of only one person. Any professional theatrical undertaking requires undivided attention and very accurate administrative-organisational work, particularly if it is a travelling theatre, acting on a different stage each time, sometimes in most unfavourable technical conditions.

And Yakhontov was intolerant of any trace of mismanagement, and the slightest administrative error or slip infuriated him.

Before the conclusion of the "friendship pact" with the club I had persuaded Yakhontov to take part in a competition of Moscow and Leningrad reciters, sponsored by the club.

The competition was the first attempt to firmly establish the art of reciting as an independent variety stage genre and to improve the standard of literary recitation. Subsequently reciters' contests became a fixture in concert organisations and were accompanied by the awarding of laureate titles to the winners.

The first place in this competition was shared by Yakhontov and that outstanding actor from the Moscow Revolution Theatre Dmitry



Vladimir Yakhontov reciting for North Fleet sailors

Orlov. Professional reciters and theatre actors who performed in this genre on the variety stage took part in the competition. They included Y. Gogoleva, S. Balashov, A. Shvarts, D. Zhuravlyov, E. Kaminka, V. Aksyonov, M. Shifman, V. Khenkin, L. Utyosov, and many others.

Yakhontov resisted for a long time, refusing to take part in the competition. He explained this by the fact that he considered himself an actor, and not a reciter. That was why he insisted that posters announcing his concerts should state "performed by" and not "read or recited by" Vladimir Yakhontov. He expressed the fear that by appearing in the reciters' competition he would prevent the "one-man theatre" from becoming accepted by the public as theatre. Why expose himself and the theatre to such a risk? "And who are the judges?" he asked with his customary irony.

But when he heard that the jury was headed by Kachalov, he thought again and — relented.

We were soon watching his performance at the competition. The first round was held in the Theatre Workers' Club. The second in a hall rented by us in the Central Telegraph Club in Gorky Street. The final round was to take place in the Large Hall of the Polytechnic Museum where poetry evenings and literary discussions were held. It was still haunted by the shade of Mayakovsky.

The greatest strain for Yakhontov, as for all the other entrants in the competition, was the first round. It took place in the theatre club's small hall before an authoritative jury which, apart from its eminent chairman, Kachalov, included M. Tarkhanov, S. Mikhoels, I. Bersenev and Y. Timeh. Theatre criticism was represented by P. Novitsky, M. Zagorsky, S. Dreiden and N. Verkhovsky. It was decided by drawing lots that Yakhontov would perform on the second day of the competition, in the afternoon. On the same day the jury heard Anton Shvarts, Vsevolod Aksyonov and other equally well-known reciters. The rules limited the performance of each competitor to thirty minutes.

Yakhontov was nervous when waiting for his turn. An hour before his performance he asked us to lock him in one of the club rooms and not to let anyone in. I could hear him pacing steadily up and down the room.

He came onto the stage with a deathly pale face. Reciting the opening lines from the first chapter of *Eugene Onegin*, he got confused, forgot the text and left the stage.

"His example is a lesson to others!" Tarkhanov repeated Pushkin's line which had just been uttered by Yakhontov.

There was a painful silence in the hall. The members of the jury were embarrassed and sat with downcast eyes. But a minute later Yakhontov pulled himself together, came on again and recited the chapter brilliantly from beginning to end. His performance gave Pushkin's works a special ring. He had once said that when he really got to know Pushkin he walked beside him and was his friend and witness of each stage in his life.

"I love Pushkin, but not as a schoolboy does," said Yakhontov. "I came to know him passionate, lively, ardent, suffering, persecuted and dying. I would be ready to shield him from Dantes' bullet."

On the stage Yakhontov immediately won the hearts of the audience by his appearance. He was remarkably elegant, not only in his way of dressing simply, severely, yet smartly, but in his whole behaviour, particularly his ability to play with things, and his unusual ease in delivering words and phrases. His habit of making the accent sometimes in unusual places in poetry frequently changed the traditionally accepted view of the meaning of the work, revealing a profound understanding of the author's conception. His interpretation was remarkable for its elegance and refinement, and also bore the stamp of a high intellect.

The competition ended in triumph for Yakhontov. If he had to share first place with Dmitry Orlov, that remarkable, original artist, this was partly because the jury wanted to encourage the profoundly national character of Orlov's style of performance. He gave a brilliant rendering of the Russian folk tale *The Clever Fellow* and the monologue from Vsevolod Vishnevsky's *The First Cavalry Army.*

Nevertheless, in spite of his undoubted success, Yakhontov was not satisfied with the results of the competition. In particular, he did not want to take part in the "winners' parade", the final concert of the best reciters in the Polytechnic Museum.

He expressed his attitude towards this in a nervous letter addressed to me. In many respects his charges were well-founded. He indubitably needed far more attention than the club gave him. This is what he wrote in his missive:

"February 25, 1933

"Dear Boris Mikhailovich,

"It is easier for me to write this — forgive me and do not take it as a sign of disrespect for you.— You know that I greatly appreciate your attitude towards me, which has often caused me to give way to you on questions which I regard as involving matters of principle. Remember, for example, the episode of the competition of which I

disapproved. You persuaded me to take part in it, and on that occasion I gave way to you on a matter of principle. Our last talk after my return from Leningrad also revealed a fundamental disagreement in our understanding of our work together. It was a mistake of principle to recite *Onegin* before the foxtrots, to have a joint evening with Balashov, and, finally, to make the latest appearance at the Polytechnic Museum. True, I was to make an emphasis of principle at this my last performance, but is there any point in adopting the pose of an oppositionist and wasting one's gunpowder in vain (or as some people like to say of me 'posing as a genius'), when there are incomparably more important tasks which demand from me and my comrades very great creative concentration and the profound conviction that a policy based on principle is, as Lenin said, the only correct policy. I think there is no need to say here what I mean by a principled approach in relation to our theatre, for the works not included in the theatre club poster (*St. Petersburg, War, Yes, Vaudeville Is the Thing*, and *Wit Works Woe*) illustrate this sufficiently clearly.

"We are faced with responsible tasks which demand that we decisively turn to work involving the masses. We need a large scale now, for we have professionally outgrown the night-blindness of individualism long ago. This is why I am going to work on the radio. It may be easier there to accomplish the tasks which now face the Sovremennik Theatre (to produce chronicles of the history of the Party). I think this is a correct decision and trust that you will give it your full support. I think also that you will not deny the obvious fact that the extremely heavy burden of work on the whole administration of the theatre club cannot create favourable conditions for the successful functioning of our theatre. The recent negligent attitude to my performance at the Nogin Club (the arm-chair was delivered without the table or the bar and is still standing there) confirms my idea that the burden of work on the administration definitely lowers the standard of my work in the case in question. This is intolerable, not only as a matter of principle. This is basically all I wanted to say. Let us agree that it will in no way affect our good relations and that you will continue to make the broadest use of my services in the work of the theatre club, which I consider an honour.

"With a comradely greeting,
"V. Yakhontov."

As Yakhontov had initiated this epistolary relationship, although he could perfectly well have had recourse to personal contact or the

telephone, I replied with a friendly letter, assuring him that I would try to create the most favourable conditions for his work. At the same time I could not support the idea, expressed by him earlier, of setting up a troupe of semi-professional young people who could not find work in any other theatre. At that time he attracted many theatrical failures who sought refuge under the cover of his talent.

A few days later he and I met and the atmosphere relaxed, particularly when he learnt that the club had prepared a new poster including all his repertoire and that I had arranged guest performances for him in his beloved Leningrad, where he was to give a Pushkin programme and *Nastasia Filippovna*, followed by *St. Petersburg, War* and *Wit Works Woe* on his next visit.

He was also to begin work on *Tsushima*, which was of great interest to the novel's author Alexei Novikov-Priboi.

The deputy director of the Theatre Workers' Club, Boris Fleitman, arrived back from Leningrad after accompanying Yakhontov on his guest performances there, and brought me another letter from him:

"Dear Boris Mikhailovich,

"How quickly events move. It is not so long since I and Gurevich, my assistant, were sitting in a cafe in one of the southern towns, hungry and spurned by GOMETs, studying *Pravda* with the reports of the 17th Party Congress. There was no end to our organisational difficulties, and we slept in a basement with rats and fat, sluggish cats. I was infinitely gloomy. Gurevich kept my spirits up, and in the end everything was eclipsed by the events of the Congress. For the last three years Gurevich had been in the Red Army while I was roaming round GOMETs slums. The GOMETs administrators often whispered into my ear that I should change my repertoire, that I would starve with a repertoire like that, and so on. I would remember Lenin and his self-control and patience, and think of the better times which would come for me and our art.

"Fleitman and I are now reading a report of the Central Committee to the 17th Party Congress and are ready to undertake the necessary organisation and planning to set up and develop the Sovremennik Theatre. We are fully aware of the prospects for its development and of the tasks facing it. We are convinced that we shall come to the next Congress with great achievements. I am now in my thirty-fifth year. The question of training the young, of a school, of passing on our experience is a very urgent one. A person with a cheerful surname, a master of organised creative form, a man of great culture and great taste, a person to whom I am deeply

devoted and with whom I would make any sacrifices, this person (you know him) will deliver you this letter....

"Yours most affectionately,
"V. Yakhontov.
"February 1, 1934. Leningrad."

Many years later a close acquaintance of mine Fialka Sternberg, daughter of the well-known artist, who was a friend of Yakhontov's and designed sets for some of his performances, showed me his letter from Leningrad describing his impressions of his guest tours:

"Fialka,

"... *Nastasia Filippovna* was a great success at the Moscow-Narva House of Culture. With an audience of 2,400. Yesterday *Retribution* was performed there—it was listened to with great attention, but it does not seem to come over to the new audience of today. Evidently, all those who worshipped Blok have either died or departed.

"I am working hard on *Nastasia Filippovna*. I want to expand the last act and abridge the first three. We're having some sunny days here. Today I went to Peterhof to watch the fountains playing for the last time. It's difficult to describe, it's something one can only watch and admire. In the morning I saw a firemen's display. Two hundred and fifty blindingly polished engines and twenty shining figures on each of them. All playing bugles, dressed in white gloves up to the elbow (as if for a ball), and tearing along to the display—splendid!

"Posters are stuck on fences:

Nikolai
ASEYEV
Osip
BRIK
Semyon
KIRSANOV

Where is lyricism?
What is lyricism?
The marvellous moment and why it is marvellous?
Why I set out alone on the path.
And what sort of path it is?
Mayakovsky's footsteps.
Can the inanimate build socialism?
A fried nail in the workers' menu.
Does it upset you?
That's where lyricism is!

"This is a great deal worse than fountains and much worse than firemen—it is simply bad!

The great LEF, the terror of the forest*
Lost his strength in old age.

"I don't see anyone here. I live like a recluse and work hard.

"If you write, which would be delightful, please send letters to Room 158, Yevropeiskaya."

I shall not dwell in detail on Yakhontov's "work" at the Theatre Workers' Club. For him it was merely a temporary safety-valve. The club by its nature and possibilities was not in a position to ensure the normal functioning of the "one-man theatre", particularly as the Sovremennik had to make frequent journeys outside Moscow. Yakhontov's "love affair" with the club lasted for about two years, after which he went to work at the Central House of the Red Army, and later in the Moscow Philharmonia. He continued to visit the club, however, not only as a guest, but also as a performer, demonstrating his latest works. His performances at the club were always a great success with professional, theatre audiences, who, it is true, regarded him not so much as an actor as a past master of the spoken literary word.

My subsequent meetings with Yakhontov took place in the Moscow of the war period, when I frequently saw him perform to soldiers and sailors in the intervals between his journeys to the fronts. In a composition written by him and entitled *Russia the Formidable* he drew a parallel between the Patriotic War of 1812 and the Great Patriotic War. The composition closed with Pushkin's words which resounded like a great symbolic summons:

Long live the sun, let darkness flee!

In October 1941 I returned to Moscow after accompanying a team of actors to the Western and Southern fronts. It was very tense in the capital. The enemy was approaching the outskirts. No less disquieting was the news from Leningrad blockaded by the enemy.

During these difficult days I met Yakhontov at an evening in the Central Art Workers' Club on October 12, which was devoted to the heroic city of Lenin. The threat hanging over Leningrad was a source of grave concern to the whole Soviet people. Muscovites felt it

* LEF—the "Left front of arts", a literary group in the 1920s with which Mayakovsky was at one time associated. Play of words *LEF* and Lev (which means "lion" in Russian).—*Ed.*

Vladimir Yakhontov beside the "Vladimir Mayakovsky" tank built with the money contributed by him

particularly acutely, for at that time the enemy was at the approaches to the capital.

Addressing the gathering, Yakhontov spoke of his resolve to stand firm side by side with the Leningraders and quoted Lenin's words that "St. Petersburg without Moscow is like one hand without the other". Dmitry Shostakovich, who had recently arrived from Leningrad, the conductor Boris Khaikin and the well-known singer Sergei Migai were also with us.

Shortly before, Moscow newspapers had printed a photograph of Shostakovich in a fireman's helmet on the roof of the Leningrad Conservatoire. He took an active part in the anti-aircraft defence of the city.

Soon after the end of the war I met Yakhontov in Moscow in Gorky Street and reminded him of this memorable evening at the Central Art Workers' Club. We also recalled the photograph of Shostakovich.

"Surely it wasn't right to use Shostakovich as a fire-watcher?" I said. "It could have deprived us of such a fine weapon against the enemy as his famous Seventh Symphony at the beginning of 1942."

"You're wrong," Yakhontov replied. "Perhaps if Shostakovich had not taken part personally in the defence of the city and had not witnessed the Leningrad blockade, there would have been no Seventh Symphony! All this must be felt and experienced personally. Otherwise there is no art...."

I think Yakhontov said this also because in 1943 he himself, with a team of artists, was in Leningrad,the town where his talent had long ago gained the first recognition. He loved Leningrad with all his passionate heart. His visit to the heroic city made his affection for it even stronger.

"I have returned to Moscow with the firm desire to move to Leningrad!" wrote Yakhontov impressed by this journey. He was struck by the moral fibre of the people whom he had seen there.

In these hard times, while on a guest tour in the Urals, he began with great passion and enthusiasm to collect money for a "Vladimir Mayakovsky" tank. He performed without a fee at numerous concerts in Magnitogorsk and Chelyabinsk with a programme consisting of Mayakovsky's works. In 1944 a powerful tank, built with the money collected by Yakhontov and bearing the name of the great poet of the Revolution on its turret, was presented to the Soviet Army. The tank was made at the Kirov works in Chelyabinsk.

Yakhontov's last creative work was a composition with the optimistic title of *A Toast to Life!* He performed it till the end of the war.

Words from an Irish drinking-song, sounded like a challenge:

Milady death, we ask you kindly
To wait outside the door!

But Milady did not comply with this request and did not allow the glass raised by him to be drained to the drop. In July 1945 this outstanding master of the word, this humanist artist who was recognised by all and for whose work new horizons were opened up, departed from us.

THE STORY OF A NOVELETTE

Among the numerous aphorisms of the famous 18th-century German scientist and writer Georg Christoph Lichtenberg are some which satirists would do well to borrow.

This physicist and publicist, who was his mother's eighteenth child, amazes one with his aphorisms and unexpected conclusions. Take the following statements, for example:

"The man was so clever that he became almost good for nothing";

"He had hundreds of ailments, but he was best at asthma";

"If a man has two pairs of trousers, let him sell one and buy this book."

No doubt many writers would be happy to use the last aphorism as an epigraph to their works, for financial considerations.

One of Lichtenberg's statements, however, has been totally disproved by my late friend Nikolai Pavlovich Smirnov-Sokolsky. It is the following:

"Dear God, let me not write a book about books!"

A People's Artist, a talented writer, an ardent and intelligent booklover, a gifted orator and polemicist, and an acknowledged figure of the Soviet stage, Smirnov-Sokolsky impressed students of literature and readers with his voluminous work of literary history entitled *Stories About Books*.

In the last few years of his life he suddenly appeared in a completely new light to those who knew him. He won recognition as an outstanding expert on Russian literature of the 18th and 19th centuries. He used all his spare time to build up a truly unique

Nikolai Smirnov-Sokolsky

library, a treasure store of Russian culture. He managed to find very rare manuscripts and first editions of famous Russian writers.

In the preface to his book Smirnov-Sokolsky wrote:

"The greatness of Russian literature, its heroic past, on the basis of which our new Soviet literature is growing and developing—all of which is expressed in those immortal witnesses, books—cannot but touch the most delicate strings of the human heart."

To people with only a superficial knowledge of Smirnov-Sokolsky, the literary image employed by him may seem unusual. The very word "delicate" may not seem typical of him, for he was closer to biting satire than lyricism. By no means everyone liked his deliberate, external rudeness, his downright straightforwardness. But those who knew him better had great respect for his truly Russian character, which had absorbed many national traits that left a clear imprint on all his work.

If he did not like something, he never kept quiet about it. If he valued something, he said so at the top of his voice, sometimes with great delicacy.

He greatly admired the Soviet variety art, which had no pre-revolutionary cultural traditions, but had established during the years of Soviet rule its own traditions based on a close link with the people, on great mobility and the ability to respond to topical political issues.

The founder of these traditions in the Soviet variety art was none other than its troubadour Smirnov-Sokolsky. He fought passionately for the prestige of and respect for the variety artist who had traversed the hard path of the Civil and the Great Patriotic wars, visiting the most remote parts of the country and carrying high the banner of Soviet art.

His father's surname was Sokolsky. The "Smirnov" came from his mother's side. He added it because he did not want to be confused with the pre-revolutionary singer of satirical songs, Sergei Sokolsky.

Smirnov-Sokolsky was Moscow born and bred. He went on the stage at the age of eighteen, during the First World War, having chosen to specialise in the so-called "conversational genre". Incidentally, he detested this term which had became accepted in the theatre, and used it to apply to idlers and chatterboxes, against whom the full force of his satire was directed.

"They're the ones who should be called the representatives of the 'conversational genre'."

Before going on the variety stage the young man tried his hand at journalism as a reporter. His literary debut was a lengthy and poetic description of a fire. Next morning instead of his ten pages of closely written text the paper printed ten lines which announced that a house had burnt down to the ground. And no poetry.

In the newspaper office he was told that a fire was not a sensation, unless the whole of Moscow burnt down!

The budding journalist soon got his two hundred lines, publishing blood-curdling details of the robbery of a grave where a rich Muscovite had just been buried. But, alas, the next day the story was disproved by the relatives of the deceased, and this marked the end of the young reporter's career.

In 1915 he tried his hand at variety as a performer of satirical songs in the Moscow region, and then at the Miniature Theatre in Sretenka Street. Unexpectedly for him, audiences liked him and he was a great success.

After the October Revolution fate brought him together with some eminent Soviet artists who became his close friends: I. Moskvin, M. Klimov, S. Kuznetsov, G. Yaron and others.

How original and inimitable he was on the stage! Evidently the main secret of success on the variety stage lies in the originality of person's talent, the individuality of his work. Smirnov-Sokolsky began his career as a satirist and humourist in the guise of a ragamuffin. This was a variety character from the period of World War I. With time the artist found his feet and created his own character—a somewhat coarse, sarcastic, passionate unmasker. He appeared on the stage as a public prosecutor and each of his numbers was an indictment of philistinism, narrow-mindedness and other vestiges of the past, of the lack of culture in people who confused "Babel with Bebel, Bebel with Hegel and Hegel with Gogol".

The artist also invented some sparse and expressive external features for his performance on the stage. He always appeared in a black velvet blouse of a special cut and with a large white bow in place of a tie. This was a stage costume, yet also one taken from real life. The cartoonists frequently pounced on him, and for a long time a friendly cartoon of him hung in our club.

But not everything was smooth and peaceful in the life of this gifted and no ordinary man. There were difficult, complicated periods, times of acute creative dissatisfaction. Satire was not always in high esteem.

It is easy to imagine what difficulties the actor experienced in building up a new satirical repertoire. He often came to the club in a devilishly bad mood and vented his anger on people who had nothing to do with his troubles.

In the late 1940s we managed to set up an "amateur" satirical ensemble in the Central Art Workers' Club, which included young theatre people and the stage celebrities such as O. Abdulov, R. Plyatt and A. Zrazhevsky. For some reason the first programme, entitled "Take Your Seats", was not to Smirnov-Sokolsky's liking. He and I had quite a row about it, mainly because of his rude, peremptory manner of discussing things.

The tiff did not last for long. Soon afterwards he sent me a note scrawled hastily in his sprawling handwriting in red ink. He had written it on a piece of paper, torn from the score of "The Pilots' March", over the music and text of the song "High-er, High-er and High-er...." Here is the text of this agitated letter:

"My dear Boris Mikhailovich,

"I am very angry (and not without good cause) with people.

"I beg you to believe that the loss of your club's friendship is a very great loss for me indeed.

"From the lips of a person who has lost a good deal in this life, this confession is not as empty as it may seem at first glance.

"With best wishes,
"Yours (or rather formerly yours),
"N. Sokolsky."

I could not help replying to this *cri de coeur*. Our friendship was immediately resumed and was never interrupted again.

Smirnov-Sokolsky also put a great deal of effort into the organisation of a Variety Theatre in Moscow and the training of young variety artists.

Perhaps this was why he was opposed to all sorts of dilettantism in variety and showed such concern for the professional training of variety artists and all questions connected with the professional life of his fellow artists.

All the same it must be said that in the sphere of his profession, and in his dealings with his comrades, he was rather rude and harsh if only for the sake of cracking a joke or witticism.

At an official meeting a representative of the Arts Committee was trying, not very convincingly, to argue the case for merging two different types of Cossack song and dance companies—the Don and the Kuban ensembles.

In the heat of the argument Smirnov-Sokolsky shouted:

"General Krasnov tried to do that long before you!"

This was a reference to the White Guard adventurist who tried to "unite" the reactionary section of the Cossacks during the Civil War.

The analogy was quite out of place. But Smirnov-Sokolsky could not do without jokes. He produced them instantly, at the slightest opportunity, in a flash. He had that sort of mind, that sort of nature.

I remember the two friends Smirnov-Sokolsky and the satirist Ilya Nabatov coming to see me at the club. Nabatov brought me his recently published book *Notes of a Variety Satirist* in which he had written warmly of Smirnov-Sokolsky. The latter, who attended "the presentation ceremony", said:

"Ilya here has written very nicely about me.... How can I repay him? I know, I'll write a good review of his book!"

However, Nabatov also told me that the two of them had arrived for a guest tour in Kislovodsk at the time when Nabatov was waiting for confirmation from Moscow that he had been awarded the title of Merited Art Worker of the RSFSR. The happy day arrived! Someone telephoned him from the capital bringing him the joyful

tidings that the decree had been signed. Immediately, not without malice, he told Smirnov-Sokolsky the news.

"You, Oleg Popov and Karand'ash are People's Artists. And now you can congratulate me, as well. I've been awarded the title of Merited Art Worker! Remember, not artist, but worker!"

"Quite right!" Smirnov-Sokolsky replied immediately. "We never thought of you as an artist."

As a compère Smirnov-Sokolsky found ways out of what were sometimes quite tricky situations.

At one concert he happened to confuse the pianist Yakov Flière with the violinist Samuil Furer and announced to the audience:

"The violinist Flière will now play to us."

Naturally Flière protested and refused to go onto the stage until Smirnov-Sokolsky had corrected his mistake.

The compère went back and made the following "amendment":

"Please excuse me, dear friends. Yakov Flière has forgotten his violin, so he will play the piano. That's even more difficult."

On another occasion he had to compère a concert in the Hermitage public garden in place of Alexander Mendelevich who had suddenly been taken ill. As luck would have it there was a particularly noisy member of the audience, who was somewhat "under the influence". He kept pestering Smirnov-Sokolsky with silly questions "from the floor".

The compère lost his patience and said, stressing the end of the sentence:

"Comrade, you're all *mixed up*!"

"Am I?" the drunk asked offended.

"Yes, you've 'mixed' beer and vodka!"

The public nuisance shrank back into his seat, cowed by the reply and the friendly laughter from the audience.

I met Smirnov-Sokolsky not only at the club but also at his home in Malaya Bronnaya Street. His library, which filled the spacious apartment on the top floor of a small three-storey house, was incredible. He showed me not only rare books, editions of works by Radishchev, Pushkin, Griboyedov and Gogol published in their lifetime and signed by them, but also his remarkable manuscript section. The owner of this precious collection could tell either a short story or a whole novel about each of his books, and amaze even those well versed in books by his erudition.

As a merited bibliophile Smirnov-Sokolsky invariably took part in the book bazaars and lotteries sponsored by the Central Art Workers' Club and was a member of the Library Council. Together with the

Smirnov-Sokolsky reading chapters from his book at the Central Art Workers' Club

well-known book specialist, the writer V. Lidin, and the art scholar V. Lobanov, he organised the first booklovers' club in the country at the Central Art Workers' Club.

Long before the publication of his book Smirnov-Sokolsky read chapters from it at our club. He was terribly nervous, because he felt he was a mere beginner in the literary field. He was most reluctant to read it. But he pulled himself together, read magnificently and was most successful, even more than as a performer of satirical sketches. His story about how he wheedled Radishchev's *Life of Fyodor Vasilyevich Ushakov* out of Demyan Bedny was given a real ovation by the audience.

Finally, something quite unexpected occurred in my friendship with Smirnov-Sokolsky.

One day, speaking about his library, he told me that he had recently acquired a very rare book by M. Filippov, the novel *Those Who Mourn*, published in 1873 in St. Petersburg and banned by the censors. The tsarist Minister of the Interior A. Timashev ordered that the novel, which had been printed in 2,000 copies, should be

destroyed, and only a few copies happened to escape this fate.

The reason for the order, as Timashev wrote in his Statement to the Ministers' Committee, was the author's portrayal of "disgraceful abuses of abolished serfdom", "the rights of landowners and the higher estate in general are depicted in it with blatant tendentiousness in the most revolting light, with extreme cynicism which offends one's moral sense", "the author of the book regards our civic social system with coarse reproachfulness and unconcealed contempt, etc.".

Further Smirnov-Sokolsky informed me that he had made yet another discovery: the author of *Those Who Mourn*, a contributor to Nekrasov's *Sovremennik* (Contemporary), was the father of M. M. Filippov, the progressive Russian scholar and writer who founded and edited the journal *Scientific Review* and died in St. Petersburg while carrying out scientific experiments on the transmission of blast over a large distance.

"So there are some interesting Filippovs, your namesakes, my friend," Smirnov-Sokolsky concluded. And he was extremely surprised to hear that the former was my grandfather and the latter my father.

Thus the novelette *A Chandelier Lit at a Distance* war born, which Smirnov-Sokolsky included in his *Stories About Books.*

Handing me a copy of his book with a friendly inscription, he said: "Remember Pushkin's words in his letter to Benkendorf, my friend: 'I cherish the name of my ancestors, for this is the only legacy which they have left me!'"

TWO DESTINIES

One day I happened to be reading some chapters from my book to an audience of theatre people. Quite honestly, I had not expected that some members of the audience would be shocked by my parallel—Chaliapin and Vertinsky! There seems to be so little in common in the fates of these two men, so different in terms of personality and professional calibre.

Can one really put their names side by side, even if there is a certain similarity in the situations which arose on their life's path?

In order to reply to this question, I shall try to retrieve my personal impressions of them from the storehouse of memory. One of them has been engrained in my memory since my youth, whereas the other impressed me when I was already well advanced in years.

One I saw and heard in all the magnificence and radiance of his powerful talent. The art of the other I encountered only when it was upheld by the mastery acquired over many long years.

I first saw and heard Chaliapin when I was in my teens, in 1916, at the opera theatre of the Petrograd People's House which was named after its honoured guardian the Prince of Oldenburg.

Built shortly before the First World War, it was one of the ugliest buildings in Petrograd. At that time it housed the flourishing private opera company of Aksarin, who managed to attract some of the greatest Russian vocalists as guest performers: L. Sobinov, I. Alchevsky, D. Smirnov, A. Moszhukhin and L. Lipkovskaya.

Fyodor Chaliapin

Fyodor Chaliapin as Mephistopheles in Gounod's *Faust*

Chaliapin appeared there in *Faust* and *The Mermaid*, enthralling audiences as Mephistopheles and the Miller.

I remember well the huge, round, uncomfortable, crammed hall. All tickets, including the "bad seats", had been sold. The public was electrified by Chaliapin's name, voice and acting. The boxes were packed, and young people were sitting on the steps in all the gangways. There were ovations and endless bouquets of flowers—in the intervals and after the performance.

A festive atmosphere reigned in the hall, although the war was still on and "am Westen nichts Neues"....

Then I did not see or hear Chaliapin again until his concert performance six years later on June 29, 1922, literally a few hours before he left his native land forever. The impressions were still fresh in my memory of his Mephistopheles and Miller, of his powerful acting. Could it really have been one and the same artist? Could it really be possible not only by acting but also by vocal means to achieve such remarkable authenticity and conviction, such a perfect combination of opera and drama? There was a great deal I

did not understand then. But for me the Miller was the familiar character from Pushkin's *The Mermaid* come to life with incredible dramatic force.

And so we saw Chaliapin in the Large Hall of the Philharmonia in Mikhailovskaya Street. This was the first time I had seen him without make-up and heard him as a concert performer. No one in the audience suspected that they were seeing the great artist for the last time.

It was a charity matinée concert arranged for Petrograd workers at the suggestion of Chaliapin himself. Was this a "mask" or his "real heart", a "gesture" or the desire to enjoy seeing for the last time the grateful glances of his fellow countrymen? I think the latter is most likely.

Although it was a week-day—Thursday—the Hall of Columns of the former Noblemen's Assembly, which had been handed over to the Philharmonia, was packed long before the beginning of the concert. Hundreds of people hoping to get in thronged the entrances, blocking Mikhailovskaya Street.

At 2 p. m. sharp the huge crystal chandeliers flooded the hall with light. The singer appeared on the stage impeccably dressed in tail-coat. The programme included the operatic arias and romances which had made him famous as a concert singer. The audience applauded wildly, making him give many encores. Towards the end he sang Russian folk songs full of nostalgia for the broad expanses of the Volga....

It was a hard time.... A time of terrible, unparalleled starvation on the Volga, the repercussions of which could be felt not only in the Republic of the Soviets, racked by war and devastation, but also round the whole world.

The large audience gathered in the hall included Chaliapin's friends. I recognised the conductors V. Dranishnikov and D. Pokhitonov, the opera singers P. Andreyev and I. Tartakov, the producer N. Smolich, the imposing figure of I. Ekskuzovich, the director of academic theatres, and former railway engineer. There was a time when he worked on two fronts, being in charge of academic theatres not only in Petrograd, but also in Moscow. The Petrograd actors even made up ditties about him:

Things are difficult for us,
Ekskuzovich, dear:
You have one foot in Moscow
And the other here!

Chaliapin's concert drew to an end. The artist willingly gave encores and finished the programme with the traditional "Dubinushka" with the audience joining in. He stretched out his arms to them as if trying to embrace everyone present and press them to his mighty bosom.

The audience still would not go. Chaliapin pointed at his watch. Time was flying and soon he must go to the landing stage. By the stage door in Mikhailovskaya Street a large crowd of young people were waiting for their beloved Chaliapin. They hoisted him onto their shoulders and carried him across the street to the Yevropeiskaya Hotel.

And in the evening, which was barely distinguishable from the afternoon because June in Petrograd is the time of the white nights, people gathered on the Lieutenant Schmidt Embankment to see him off. They were Chaliapin's friends and admirers, representatives of theatres and a delegation from the Petrograd Regional Trade Union Council. The sky was overcast with leaden clouds coming from the Gulf of Finland. A light rain was falling.

After the first siren Chaliapin appeared in the ship's deck house, in a light-coloured suit and hatless. The gusts of wind ruffled his hair. He took out a large handkerchief and waved it. The last siren sounded.

The landing stage rang with farewell cries.

"Goodbye, Fyodor Ivanovich!"

But none of those standing on the embankment by the landing stage heard a "goodbye" in reply.

Much water has passed under the bridge since then.... It is said that after leaving his native land Chaliapin was tormented by acute bouts of homesickness, the most terrible of all diseases.

There is a certain similarity between his destiny and that of the great Russian painter Ilya Repin, who emigrated to his Penati which was then part of Finland. The great artist frequently demonstrated by his behaviour that it is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous. He elevated to a "matter of principle" his disagreement with the Soviet government over the abolition of a letter in the Russian alphabet, without which his name sounded bizarre.

Not even the arguments of good friends could bend the old man's stubborn will, although the strip of Russian land, the Island of Kronstadt, which could be seen in the far distance in the Gulf of Finland, drew him like a magnet.

Even Vertinsky, that "tramp of an artist", could not endure

forever roaming around in foreign lands and eventually returned to his own country.

I remember his concert in Moscow in December 1945. A large number of Moscow actors, including many who were old friends of Vertinsky's before he emigrated, gathered in the hall of the All-Russia Theatre Society.

The first part of this memorable evening, which began about midnight, was dedicated to Chaliapin. Vertinsky read his memoirs about the great artist from his book *Away from My Country*, then his poems about Russia written during emigration, and sang the songs "Chinese Water Colour", "A Minute on the Road", "The Last Glass", "Johnny" and the sweet, lyrical song of a happy father "My Little Girls". Alas, he was not destined to see his beloved daughter on the screen as Ophelia, for the film of *Hamlet* was released after his death.

This was my first meeting with Vertinsky. My generation knew him only from gramophone records which happened to turn up in Moscow. We listened to the recordings of his songs, acknowledging his talent, we could not help disliking him as a person who had fled from his native land and been for a time a kind of symbol of the White Guard Russian emigration. At a distance he seemed like one of the last relics of the Russian empire:

Your fingers smell of incense
And grief sleeps in your lashes...
We need nothing now,
We regret nothing!

And now this "relic" had capitulated and arrived back in Moscow, which gave him a warm, friendly welcome, forgiving him for the "sins of his youth".

On my way to Vertinsky's concert I thought I would see a museum piece on the stage, a kind of live court chamberlain of His Magesty in a splendid gold-embroidered uniform. But everything was quite different, although in appearance he did remind one of a Roman patrician. I was particularly struck by this resemblance later, in 1948, when I saw him on the beach at Riga with a towel draped over his bare shoulders. At the concert in 1945 the audience, which included some well-known experts on the arts, was captivated by his skill.

He showed himself to be an indubitable master later, too, when making his film debut as the cardinal in *Conspiracy of the Doomed*. This inspired Emil Krotky to compose the following caustic epigram about him:

You appear on the screen
In an unexpected guise...
A cardinal! That your fingers
Smelling of incense comes as no surprise!

One day I asked Vassily Kachalov, who greatly enjoyed listening to Vertinsky and had a very high opinion of him, what was the basis of his skill.

"What is it? First of all, the expressiveness of his singing, his brilliant mastery of the art of intonation, his gestures, his ability by some distinctive devices, mainly the movements of his fingers, to create images, to transform himself. I have never seen such mastery of the arms and hands, such "singing arms" in any other actor. Naturally his mime is brilliant too."

Moskvin had exactly the same opinion of Vertinsky.

I remember going to Vertinsky's dressing-room after his concert at the Central Art Workers' Club. He had taken off his tail-coat and was sitting by the mirror in a snow-white shirt, removing the remains of the light make-up from his face.

"It was stuffy out there, difficult to sing," he said, rolling his r's in the French manner.

The hall really had been twice as full as it was supposed to be. The gangways were crammed and all the extra seats occupied. The fire authorities were threatening to charge the organisers with breaking the fire regulations.

"And not only here, it's the same everywhere. In the last few years I've travelled round almost the whole of the Soviet Union. It'll soon be 40 years when I first came on to the stage. And I'd like to celebrate the event. I am thinking of your place, the Central Art Workers' Club."

This conversation took place in January 1956.

"What a pity that my old friends are no longer with us—Kachalov, Moskvin, Tarkhanov.... They were good to me, although I was not very fond of their boss—Konstantin Stanislavsky. I must confess, there was something personal in it: I could not forgive him for not taking me on at the Art Theatre because I rolled my r's.

"Later, when Stanislavsky heard me in Paris in a huge concert hall, he came backstage to say he was sorry for not having recognised the artist in me. I could have played Karenin, couldn't I? Or the Baron in *The Lower Depths?* Those roles were simply written for me. Then my life might have taken quite a different turn.

"If I were to write my memoirs I would have called them *The Road to a Heart Attack.* I've always been on the move. All my life. To a

Alexander Vertinsky

large extent it's my own fault, of course. But now it's time for me to think of a settled life.... I've got my wife and daughters here. They make me feel younger by protesting when I call myself an old man. 'Oh, you're not old, Daddy!' I've got a nice flat in Moscow. And I've furnished it beautifully. An artist must be surrounded by beautiful things. Everyone needs beauty. But it is particularly important for an actor. You should see my Venetian cut glass! In Leningrad I literally snatched it from under the nose of the counsellor at the British Embassy. He asked the second-hand shop to keep it for him until 1 p.m. I stayed there watching the clock all the time, and at exactly two minutes past one I paid for it. Five minutes later the counsellor arrived and forgot himself to the point of stamping his foot.... Oh, Leningrad, Leningrad. How I love that city. I can't recognise anything in Moscow, but in Leningrad everything is familiar: Nevsky Prospekt, the Admiralty, Winter Palace Square, Rossi's masterpiece, the Anichkov Bridge, the Bronze Horseman, Senate Square.... Everything is linked with my youth. And elderly people are always attracted by the romance of their young days...."

Vertinsky came to the end of his "road to a heart attack" in Leningrad where he went on a guest tour in June 1957.

The attack began in the Astoria Hotel. Unfortunately, there was no nitroglycerine at hand and it was all over in a few minutes. When the ambulance arrived, it was no longer needed.

Next day we went to the Moscow Variety Theatre in Mayakovsky Square to meet the coffin which had been flown to Moscow.

The scheduled variety show was just finishing. The audience had no idea, of course, that the management of the theatre was carrying through the stage door the dead body of a variety artist, a man with a most unusual biography, who had come to the end of his life's path.

Next morning the coffin was carried into the foyer.

There were many actors in the crowd of admirers and friends who gathered to accompany the artist on his last journey to the Novodevichye Cemetery. And just as many elderly people who were mourning not only the demise of an artist, but also their youth that will never return.

Two men, two artists, differing greatly in professional stature, yet enabling us to compare their fates.

One of them is buried far from his native land, in Paris. The other lies in the embrace of his native soil.

The lives of both these artists confirm Chaliapin's words that we all belong to our own country, our own people, and that we must remain with our native land not only in spirit, but also physically with "all our scars, all our calluses, and all our humps".

ROVING ACTORS

There are actors whose skill inspires one with an infinite love of the theatre. The magical power of their impact on the audience is so irresistible that the theatre becomes the *raison d'être* for many young men and women.

Take, for example, the brothers Robert and Rafail Adelgeim who were born in Moscow and received their theatrical training in Austria.

Brothers by blood and vocation they completed a course in the drama department of the Vienna Conservatoire. Their teacher was the famous Burgtheater actor Adolf von Sonnenthal, a favourite of democratic audiences in Vienna. He was a champion of humanism. His acting was distinguished by naturalness and simplicity, at a time when the conservatoire where he taught the art of acting was still dominated by the obsolete traditions of the German classical school with its high-flown declamatory style of performance. Sonnenthal undoubtedly had a great influence on his pupils, particularly on the younger, Rafail.

While reminiscing warmly about Sonnenthal, the Adelgeim brothers commented most sceptically on the general atmosphere prevailing in the Vienna Conservatoire. They said that their skill had developed and matured in Russia.

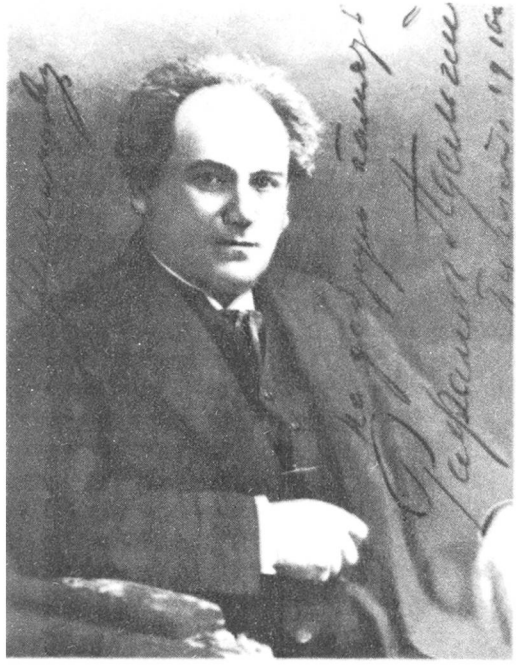
Robert Adelgeim described the following episode from his student years:

Robert Adelgeim

"One day the director of the Conservatoire criticised my acting of a role. His criticism was most unconvincing. I replied: 'Yes, sir, but I think....' To which the director immediately retorted: 'You think? An actor's not supposed to think at all!' "

Obviously such an approach could not promote an actor's intellectual development. The main emphasis was placed on developing the actor's physical apparatus, his voice, his ability to move about the stage, fence, wear costumes, put on make-up, and his ear for music.

On leaving the Conservatoire the Adelgeims worked separately in various theatres in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. They returned to their native land in 1894 and spent the next forty years acting together. True skill came to them from contact with the Russian theatre. It was in Russia that they developed from students into actors. Their fine life of dedicated service to the stage is linked not only with Petrograd and Moscow, but primarily with the pre-revolutionary provinces which they introduced to the finest works of the classics.



Rafail Adelgeim

I first met them when I was still in my teens and they were appearing at the People's House in Petrograd in the 1915/16 season. It was there, from high up in the gallery, that I managed to see the Adelgeims in almost the whole of their repertoire. After hours of queueing, the visitors to the gallery would drop a coin in the turnstile, and the rest depended on fleetness of foot and promptitude. The person who could run fastest had a good chance of claiming a seat by the front rail and enjoying the Adelgeims' acting in *Oedipus Rex, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, The Merchant of Venice, Die Räuber, Kean* or *Uriel Acosta.*

Robert was more popular. This was, naturally, by virtue of his line. He played Hamlet, Othello, Uriel Acosta, Karl Moor and Oedipus. He was a tragic hero. Here you could see the correctness of Nemirovich-Danchenko's words that sometimes the audience does not distinguish between the actor and the role he performs.

He undoubtedly possessed a masterly technique, with perfect control of voice, mime and gesture. His weak point was his small stature. For the tragic actor this was a serious obstacle. He

Robert Adelgeim as Uriel Acosta in Karl Gutzkow's tragedy of the same name

managed to overcome this external shortcoming by using special footwear with incredibly high heels and thick soles. In his acting Robert to a large extent proceeded from reason rather than emotion.

His younger brother, Rafail, was more talented, more profound and emotional. He played character parts, also appearing as Iago and Ben Akiba and rising to the heights of true tragedy in the roles of Shylock and King Lear.

It sometimes happens that of all the characters created by an actor he is particularly remembered in a role which is of no great importance yet shines out in his work like a precious diamond.

During the First World War a cheap melodrama called *The Execution* was extremely popular with the theatre-going public. It was written by an actor at the Alexandrinsky Theatre, Grigory Ghe, who, incidentally, was also the author of *Trilby*, another melodrama popular at that time. The best role in *The Execution* had been intended by Ghe for himself. It was the role of a Spanish cafe singer called Godda. As things turned out, however, it was Robert

Adelgeim and not Grigory Ghe who won fame as the creator of the stage character of Godda.

I had the opportunity of comparing his acting with that of other performers—Grigory Ghe and the well-known tragedian Vagram Papazyan. Neither of them could *touch* Adelgeim.

The figure of the ingenuous, emotional Spaniard, now lyrical, now angry, now proud, was one of the talented actor's greatest achievements. Robert Adelgeim conveyed the whole complex alternation of moods and emotions perfectly.

The actor had to produce a subtle mixture of Russian and Spanish pronunciation for the role.

Robert Adelgeim told me that while working on the role he had not only observed various types of Spaniards, but also made an intense study of Spanish, particularly its phonetics. His Godda did not speak simply like a foreigner mispronouncing Russian. He spoke as only a Spaniard would with all his national peculiarities.

In the course of the play the actor sang a delightful little French song accompanying himself with the melodic ring of two crystal glasses. The audience invariably demanded an encore. He performed the song with such ease and grace that no one ever doubted that Godda was a first-class cabaret artist of the highest calibre without a shade of vulgarity. If Godda in *The Execution* was Robert's "trump card", the role of Swengali in *Tribly* was an equal triumph for Rafail Adelgeim. Only on one occasion, during a guest tour in Odessa, did he have trouble with the role.

In the play Swengali gives his address to another character:

"16 Tuileries," he says.

During the fifth performance of *Tribly* the usually most careful Rafail unexpectedly made a mistake and gave the number of the house wrongly as 18. This immediately elicited a response from a pedantic Odessan member of the audience who had not missed a single performance by the popular actors.

"Swengali! How did you find time to move to another house?"

This episode was related to me by the popular operetta actress Regina Lazareva.

One of the finest characters created by Rafail Adelgeim was the small role of Ben Akiba in Gutzkow's tragedy *Uriel Acosta.*

Onto the stage comes an old man, led by rabbis, who personifies religious fanaticism upholding the laws of the Old Testament. His meeting with Acosta and the verbal duel which took place between them were elaborated down to the minutest detail. The mises-en-

Rafail Adelgeim as King Lear

scène were calculated with mathematical precision. What prevailed here—inspiration or technique? There can be no doubt that technique was the basis of the Adelgeims' skill.

As a rule I saw each of their plays several times. In subsequent performances everything was repeated with mechanical precision as if it had been set in an unchangeable form.

At that time, of course, I did not understand all these subtleties. I could not understand how an actor could repeat himself like that in each performance.

I remember the well-known Alexandrinsky Theatre actor Pavel Samoilov as Protasov in *The Living Corpse*. I also saw his performance many times and each time Samoilov introduced new details and nuances. Later I came to realise that this was inspiration, that this was the creative process of enriching a part with more and more new discoveries.

All the same I was fond of the Adelgeims. Strange though it may seem, it was Galileo's famous words "But the earth does revolve" that helped me make their acquaintance.

This phrase is repeated by Uriel Acosta in his argument with Ben Akiba in Act IV of Gutzkow's tragedy.

I decided that Robert was wrong in stressing the second syllable in the word "vertitsa" (revolves) and considered it essential to correct pronunciation. I would save him from sure "disgrace" before someone else discovered the mistake, I thought. And perhaps he would help me along in the theatre!

Finding out the Adelgeim brothers' address was a fairly simple affair. They lived in Sergievskaya Street, near Liteiny Prospekt. I hesitated a long time before mounting the staircase and even longer before ringing the bell. It was ten o'clock in the morning. Plucking up my courage I pulled the bell. It jangled loudly.

The door was opened by a neat chamber maid in a white apron and cap.

"May I see Mr. Adelgeim?" I asked with a tremor in my voice, even forgetting to say which of the brothers I wanted.

"Are you from the tailor's?"

I must say that this encounter cooled my ardour and diminished my desire for a professional chat with Adelgeim. Fancy taking me, who was dreaming of fame on the stage, for a mere tailor's apprentice!

"Who shall I say it is? Do you want Robert or Rafail Adelgeim?"

"I want Robert. Please tell him I have come to talk about *Uriel Acosta*."

"He is not up yet!"

Oh dear, surely I was not to go away empty-handed? No, retreat was impossible. I would talk to Rafail. It was then that the idea came to my mind of asking him to recommend me to a drama school after our "professional chat".

The maid lead me into the dining room. Perhaps it was not a particularly impressive one, but after my family's more than modest apartment it seemed extraordinarily elegant.

I was studying the furniture and china cabinet and did not notice a stocky, elderly man of medium height, with curly, greyish hair, enter the room.

He was dressed in pyjamas and slippers.

"Robert Lvovich," I addressed him.

"I'm Rafail Lvovich. It's probably my brother you want, isn't it? He can see you in half an hour. You will have to wait or come back later."

I was very ashamed of my mistake, but it must be borne in mind that I had seen the famous brothers only in make-up and from the

heights of the gallery. All the same I was afraid to let Rafail go. Goodness only knew what would happen in half an hour's time. Perhaps Robert would decide he could not see me. I decided to put my money on Rafail. He listened to me with a serious expression. Then followed a short silence, after which he burst into peals of laughter which reduced me to a state of utter confusion.

He laughed so long and so loudly that the hero of my dreams, Robert, came into the dining room in a hastily donned dressing gown.

"Robert, just listen to this 'critic'," said Rafail, choking with laughter.

However I was richly rewarded by the brothers who arranged for me to have free entrance to all their guest performances in the People's House. After that I used to drop in to see them backstage, wrote them admiring letters, and received the gift of their portraits with friendly inscriptions which I keep to this day.

This was during the First World War. The tsarist government was mobilising reserves of "cannon fodder". The hospitals were full of wounded. At one of the performances in the People's House it was announced that in the intervals the Adelgeims would organise a collection from the audience to help the wounded soldiers.

At the end of an act Robert came onto the proscenium dressed as Othello and said:

"I have a young friend. He is thirteen years old. He has sent me some poetry dedicated to our wounded soldiers. I shall recite it to you, ladies and gentlemen, and make a contribution on his behalf to our wounded soldiers!"

The actor announced my name for all to hear and placed a 100-rouble note on the tray. Then he recited the naive, childish poetry the content of which has vanished entirely from my memory.

Many years later I met the Adelgeim brothers in Moscow at the Masters of Arts' Club. Our friendship was renewed on a new basis, and I decided one day to remind Robert of that memorable occasion in the People's House.

It transpired that he not only remembered everything perfectly, but had even kept my letters. The next day he made a special visit to the club and brought two of these letters addressed to him, in which I discovered a large number of spelling mistakes. One of them contained my photograph as a small, tousle-headed, large-eared boy. On the back was the following inscription written in a childish scrawl: "Dear Robert Lvovich,

"You have given me your portrit with a nice inscription. I am giving you my portrit so you will remember your most ardent and devoted admirer."

"Goodness me," I said, reading this, "what an illiterate rascal I was!"

The Adelgeims did not take easily to the onset of old age. Robert felt his years most painfully. For Rafail, as a character actor, age was not so important.

Yet they were both fond of saying:

"Things are going badly for us. There is nothing like age to make a person look old. Yet not so long ago people used to say there were only three safe investments in Russia: Singer sewing machines, George Borman sweets, and the Adelgeim brothers!"

In the spring of 1932 Robert suddenly disappeared from the Moscow horizon. On May 2 I received a letter from Leningrad in his fanciful, highly calligraphic handwriting:

"Dear Boris,

"You know my motto—strive for self-perfection (what a long word), as long as strength, not age, permits.

"I have decided to do something which, if it is successful, will undoubtedly help me to attain this goal. I have never gambled at cards, the races or similar things; I not only disliked taking risks, but quite detested it. This is a risk of a different kind, however, and I want to take it.

I shall have to spend eight or ten days, perhaps, in isolation, and if you are in Leningrad during this time I may be unable to see you in spite of my sincere desire to the contrary.

"Nevertheless I am giving you the telephone number G 1-50-71.

"It is not my number, but that of my neighbours who will immediately and willingly tell you everything necessary. So far no one, not even my brother, knows about my secret plans. I am living here incognito. Well, at least I look forward to your telephone call. All the best.

"Yours,
"Robert Adelgeim."

Today, many years after the death of Robert who was run down by a bus at a Moscow crossing in December 1934 I can reveal the nature of these "secret plans" which testify to his iron determination to

preserve himself as long as possible for the stage.

He went to Leningrad to have a plastic operation on his face, to lift his sunken cheeks and smooth away the wrinkles as much as possible.

Robert fought old age with all his might. In 1931 Moscow celebrated the brothers' seventieth birthday in the branch of the Bolshoi Theatre. They were awarded the honorary title of People's Artists. It was only then that we learned that Robert was a year older than his brother. Up till then by mutual agreement between the brothers Robert had been regarded as the younger so as to have at least the moral right to play young heroes.

Shortly before his death Robert appeared at the Masters of Arts' Club in the role of Othello, which demands tremendous expenditure of emotion and physical strength. Rafail played Iago as usual.

"What is the secret of your remarkable power?" the young actors asked the Adelgeims.

"The ability to *breathe* properly!" the brothers replied.

They both attached tremendous importance to an actor's ability to control his physical apparatus of breathing.

A few years ago I came across a pretentious little book of memoirs published in Paris in 1955 and written by an old theatrical impresario, a Russian émigré by the name of L. Leonidov, who also wrote a lot of rubbish about Chaliapin. From this book I "learned" that Robert Adelgeim had fled abroad from the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution and lived there until his death (!).

The author of the memoirs alleged that he had accompanied Robert from Berlin to his dying son in Italy and that Robert had wanted to be buried beside Rafail but had remained alone in a foreign land to the end of his days.

I could not have believed this even if it had not fallen to me to deliver the funeral oration by Robert's coffin. Four years later Rafail also departed from us. The brothers were reunited in the family vault which bears some exquisite marble sculpture brought by them from Italy to Moscow long before the October Revolution.

The life of these fine roving actors deserves the close attention of historians of the Russian theatre and should find its biographer.

SOLOMON THE WISE

It is not easy to win unquestionable authority in the complex and contradictory world of art. In the arts, as in literature, causes for dispute are constantly arising.

Yet this man, short in stature, with the face of Anathema, a protruding lower lip and a large, intelligent, bulging forehead, enjoyed the universal recognition and affection of the whole theatre world.

He was acknowledged as the artistic director of a theatre, as a philosopher and theoretician of the arts, as an ardent tribune and active public figure, and as an actor who created on the stage a whole gallery of unforgettable characters—from the gentle Tevier to the tragic Lear.

Some people sought to explain this attitude towards him not only by his undoubted talent, not only by his personal charm and human qualities, but also by the fact that the theatre of which he was the head was the only one of its kind in Moscow. But Mikhoels' importance in the field of art, of course, extended far beyond the limits of a national theatre.

It would be both naive and ridiculous to look for the cause of his remarkable popularity in the unique nature of the enterprise which he ran. The State Jewish Theatre was his *raison d'être* like everything else which concerned the national culture of his people. But narrow nationalism was alien to this man. He was ardently opposed to chauvinism. He had the greatest respect for Russian culture, imbued with humanist ideals, which he admired greatly, knew and loved as

the one which was closest to his heart and which had accompanied him since youth. And he also drew on all that was best in the treasure-store of world art.

Everyone needed his judgements on the theatre.

At professional talks and conferences in our club one often saw audiences "ebb" and "flow". Actors and producers, tired of long speeches, would flee to the club's lobbies. People smoked in the foyer and corridors. There was a constant din of voices. The discussion continued in small groups and flared up "free-style". Then suddenly the noise abated and the people flooded back into the hall. It was Mikhoels' turn to speak.

Onto the platform came a man whose whole appearance contradicted the conventional idea of an actor. He used to say that he was waiting for an international competition for the most unstagelike appearance because he would be bound to win a prize.

The audience listened to Mikhoels with bated breath, their eyes riveted to the speaker, who accompanied his speech with a few highly characteristic, expressive gestures. There was not a trace of affectation about him. Many were surprised at the somewhat deliberate casualness of his dress. As far as domestic matters were concerned, Mikhoels had his head in the clouds. When it was a question of the theatre, he always meticulously stood on principle.

I have kept some notes of his speeches at discussions on the training of Soviet actors.

"What is an actor's image?" said Mikhoels. "His image, as I understand it, is the extension of his socio-political activity. If he has no clear political views, no philosophy, his art will also lack ideological content. All this must not be interpreted in a primitive way. The social does not simply amount to a question of paying membership dues to MOPR (the International Organisation for Aid to Revolutionary Fighters.—*Ed*). First and foremost, one must be able to regard one's work as socio-political activity. This is what distinguishes the Soviet actor from foreign actors. When I was in America in 1943 I met Lion Feuchtwanger in Hollywood. In a conversation with me he said: 'I must warn you that I don't have anything to do with politics because it is all Greek to me. I am a writer, a novelist. Politics is not my sphere.'

"'It's a good thing that you warned me, Mr. Feuchtwanger, because after reading your works *Erfolg*, *Der jüdische Krieg*, *Die hässlichen Herzogin*, and *Jud Süss*, I formed the opposite opinion. I decided firmly that you did have something to do with politics. And I felt this particularly when I was acting in the film *Die Geschwister*

Solomon Mikhoels

Oppenheim based on your novel!' I had to tell Feuchtwanger that he reminded one of the Molière characters who lived for years without suspecting that he had been speaking prose all the time!"

Mikhoels quoted this episode because he was firmly opposed to lack of ideological commitment in art.

"Ideas are the wings which carry an actor forward," he told young actors. "You must learn from those people with whom a person's education begins, with whom an appreciation of art and life begins. You must learn from literature as the main and basic form of art. No matter what art you are dealing with, the first things you will encounter are Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol and Gorky. They surrounded you, they took you by the hand and led you to art. That is why from the rostrum, in the school, and in the theatre, everywhere, I maintain that there is no theatre without ideologically-committed political literature!

"I should like to divide the question of the actor's training into two parts," said Mikhoels. "The actor is taught by teachers, producers, the theatre, and the world around him. But there is yet another

important factor which I would call the 'actor's self-training'. Rumour has it that one day in the Alexandrinsky Theatre where the famous Varlamov, or 'Uncle Kostya' as he was called, was playing,a young innovator-producer was in charge of the rehearsal. Varlamov arrived, sat down and said:

"'Well, producer, "stylise" me now!'

"This was a joke, of course. But often young people who have entered drama school also say: 'Train me.' They do not understand that without hard work in the sphere of *self-training* no experienced teacher or brilliant producer will be able to make actors of them.

"From the very beginning you must cultivate in yourself a poetic vision of life, the ability to apprehend the turbulent world full of joys and torments by fixing your sensations in images. The actor is above all a poet. The ability to see the world in all its complexity and contradictions, of course, depends on the actor's world outlook. But if this world outlook is not accompanied by the ability to make a poetic apprehension of reality and reveal the apprehended truth in artistic images, everything will be sterile from the actor's point of view. When I speak about a poetic apprehension of the world I am by no means contrasting this concept with the ideological principle."

I have a page of type-written text dictated by Mikhoels for a news sheet of the Central Art Workers' Club. The news sheet did not appear for some reason, but I still keep Mikhoels' contribution carefully edited in his own hand. It was he who wrote the headline: "To Know! To Know as Much as Possible!" Then come the following lines so typical of Mikhoels.

"It is essential for me, a Soviet actor, to have a profound, comprehensive knowledge of things. To know! To know as much as possible! To know and understand the world, reality, life, the people, man, as profoundly as possible. To know the world in order to refashion it for the happiness of man! To know life in order to appreciate its joy and light, its poetic beauty!

"To know the people in order to know myself, to learn how to fight for the people's happiness, as for my own happiness. To know man in order to kill the beast and promote the triumph of that which is human, humane. To know in order that this knowledge may become an instrument in our struggle against the revived forces of reaction, an instrument in the struggle for the triumph of Lenin's ideas. To know in order to make, to fashion our militant Soviet art the better! Any assistance rendered to me, a Soviet artist, in acquiring knowledge of our complex reality inspires me with a feeling of profound gratitude."

Solomon Mikhoels as King Lear

I remember Mikhoels telling some actors about his impressions of the Lenin Komsomol Theatre in Leningrad. He was amazed at the performance of a young actress called Rodionova as Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya in the play *A Legend About the Truth.*

"Just think, this actress has been on the stage for two years. She came to drama school after a hard time as a nurse at the front in the Second World War. I watched the play with a large group of sophisticated theatre-goers. I cannot describe the emotion which overwhelmed us. In the last act the producer set the actress an incredibly difficult task. She was alone, this small girl, on the vast stage, with the bleak, huge auditorium. The act lasted for forty minutes, yet the tension in this cold theatre rose to breaking point and the audience sat with bated breath. How did she manage to achieve such a triumph? Thanks to her poetic talent. Alexander Goldenweiser was sitting next to me, an old man who has seen a great deal in his time.... The years seemed to slip from him, and he glowed again with the fire of youth.

"I should like everyone who decided to go on the stage to master the language of poetry completely and to remember that an actor must be able to express ideas in inspired poetic form."

It was his faith in literature, his ardent love of literature, that made Mikhoels the close friend of many writers, Alexei Tolstoy in particular. Mikhoels had an extremely high opinion of the work of this outstanding master of the pen.

Vladimir Khenkin, although he was a friend of Mikhoels, could not resist commenting sarcastically:

"Now then, Solomon, what are you doing moving in aristocratic circles all the time? First it's Count Tolstoy, then Count Ignatyev!"

"Don't be envious, Volodya!" replied Mikhoels calmly. "Envy is a base feeling. Remember you are talking to King Lear! We'll see who's in whose debt!"

Khenkin immediately retorted with another epigram.

Mikhoels appreciated humour and was himself fond of making jokes, so that it was sometimes hard to tell whether he was serious or not.

He liked repeating Sholom Aleichem's words: "Talent is like money: you either have it or you don't!"

I remember one of the entrants for the reciters' competition at the Masters of Arts' Club who nearly drove the audience frantic by reciting slowly and tediously one chapter from *Dead Souls* after another.

The tactful Kachalov who headed the jury sat with downcast eyes, writhing inwardly at this public execution of Gogol. Finally even he could stand no more and timidly touched the bell on the table. The reciter did not pause.... Kachalov rang again, more loudly.

"Excuse me, but this is only a small part of my act," the reciter objected.

At the jury meeting everyone was hurling thunder and lightning at him. Only Mikhoels maintained an impenetrable silence.

"Don't you agree, that there is no point in putting him through to the second round, Solomon Mikhailovich?" asked Kachalov cautiously.

"On the contrary. I think he has a good claim to a prize. He should be allowed to skip the second round!"

"Whatever for?" asked Tarkhanov indignantly.

"His memory. You just try learning *Dead Souls* by heart from beginning to end!"

I often saw Mikhoels bright and cheerful, full of sparkling humour.

Once he was quite unable to stop laughing. True, the rest of the large audience in the Central Art Workers' Club,too, were choking with laughter. It was in March 1940. Solomon had reached the age of fifty.

It was with great difficulty that we managed to obtain his consent to a birthday celebration at the club: he was extremely sceptical of anniversary eulogies and gave a clever imitation of what is said on such occasions both on the stage and then behind the scenes.

He agreed only on condition that it would take the form of a *kapoustnik.*

We fulfilled this condition only in part, but there was no way for the hero of the occasion to retreat. He was finally won over by an act from the Red Army Central Theatre.

A group of actors cast in the play *Field Marshal Suvorov* came onto the stage to greet him, all in costumes and make-up. They performed a dialogue between Suvorov and Paul I.

Spluttering with rage and clenching his fists, Paul screamed at the Field Marshal who was not in uniform:

"Rebel! Filibuster! I'll shake up the lot of you! Your uniform! Uniform! I see it all! You deliberately left it off! Quiet! I am the emperor! I am the sovereign! I ... I ... Kutaisov!"

A servile Kutaisov appeared on the stage.

"Summon Mikhoels to me!" Paul ordered. "In uniform. In birthday uniform!"

Kutaisov instantly appeared in the auditorium and ushered Mikhoels, who was sitting in the front row, onto the stage. Paul scrutinised him carefully, banged his cane on the floor and said: "Masltov, Mihoels! Sei gesund!" (Congratulations, Mikhoels! We wish you good health!)

The rest of the Russian emperor's greeting was delivered in pure Yiddish.

It is difficult to describe what happened to Mikhoels at that moment. He literally collapsed with laughter and had to be given a chair.

But I also saw him sad and upset, not only by his own troubles, but also the misfortunes of his colleagues in the theatre.

He was deeply concerned at the closing of the second Moscow Art Theatre and later at the collapse of the Kamerny Theatre. He was worried by questions concerning the repertoire of his own

theatre and the problem of an audience. He rightly maintained that most young Jews did not know their native language. This also affected their attitude towards the State Jewish Theatre. Yet he was extremely fond of these young people who were so sceptical of patriarchal traditions.

I saw Mikhoels wrathful and uncompromising during the war. He directed the full force of his mighty oratorial talent against fascism, speaking at numerous gatherings and meetings like a real tribune. And he remained thus to the end of his life.

Working on the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, he addressed to Jews all over the world, and his was the courageous voice of a citizen of the Soviet Union. "A new, proud generation has grown up in our free Homeland, a generation which has absorbed the great progressive ideals of mankind. A generation which has understood with its whole being the meaning of the word 'Homeland', which has become a Homeland for all the peoples inhabiting it. This generation knows no fear! This generation cannot feel itself to be a victim!"

Early in January 1948 Solomon Mikhoels headed a committee for organising an anniversary evening at the Central Art Workers' Club to celebrate the 65th anniversary of Alexei Tolstoy's birth.

However, the event at which he was to take the chair and reminisce about his friend, took place without him. From Minsk came the terrible news that we would hear Mikhoels no more. The pain of this sad loss was still fresh—only a week had passed since the day when the outstanding Soviet actor met his tragic end. There had not even been time to delete the words that Mikhoels would be in the chair from invitations sent out for the evening.

It was perfectly understandable that the meeting devoted to Tolstoy's memory should automatically turn into an evening of reminiscences about the creative friendship between the writer and Mikhoels.

Lieutenant General A. Ignatyev in a letter to Lyudmila Tolstaya expressed his regret that illness had prevented him from being present at the "evening organised by Tolstoy's closest friend—Solomon Mikhoels".

"Both these friends," Ignatyev wrote, "will always remain inseparable for me, not because of those feelings which we entertained for each other, but because of the common view of Russian history and Russian reality which these two thinkers shared. They felt the same love for Russia because they understood it in the same

Mikhoels as King Lear. Drawing by A. Tyshler

way. They did not live their lives in vain, but left models of true art for many generations of our Homeland.

"From Tolstoy we shall learn to write, from Mikhoels we shall learn to act on the stage, and from both we shall learn to think and judge about art."

Ideologists and moralists who serve the bourgeoisie can never understand that only the Great October Socialist Revolution was able to break down social and national barriers in our country. In the age of Sholom Aleichem's "wandering stars" could even the most outstanding Jewish actor dream of becoming a people's artist, of receiving the state's highest decoration?

Could Mikhoels, born in a patriarchal Jewish family, whose father wanted to see his son as a barrister or doctor, but certainly not as King Lear, have dreamt of it?

Bourgeois moralists, those "paupers in the realm of ideas", will never understand the psychology of those Russian people, the true patriots of our Homeland, who for its sake managed to renounce their past, their noble titles, and win a place of honour, in the advance-guard of Soviet literature.

Nor will they ever understand the profound, inner causes which made possible a firm, creative friendship between a Jewish actor and members of the Russian aristocracy who found the courage and

honesty to cancel their past for the sake of our country's future, to break with the emigration, to return to their native land, and devote themselves to serving the people. Alexei Tolstoy used to say when he was pondering on this or that question:

"I must ask Solomon the Wise!"

Today neither Alexei Tolstoy nor Solomon the Wise are with us.

The former lives on in his books, the latter in the recollections of contemporaries and his roles on the screen.

And how we miss them—these cheerful, life-loving people!

DIAMONDS GALORE

Miskhor is the warmest spot in the Crimea. Many years ago, by the sea shore, a small two-storey country house dubbed "Nyura" stood here amidst poplars.

At the beginning of our turbulent century Maxim Gorky lived here for a while "to be closer to Lev Tolstoy" who was resting on the Crimean coast—at Gaspra. The giants of Russian music Rachmaninov and Chaliapin also visited the house.

"Nyura" stood in such close proximity to the sea that storms frequently whipped salt sprays up to its walls, and snow-white sea gulls soared smoothly over the roof, rending the air with their piercing cries.

It is interesting that this was the place where Gorky wrote his proud *Song of the Stormy Petrel.*

In the 1920s little "Nyura" won the hearts of many admirers—actors, painters and musicians, because its hospitable walls housed the art workers' holiday home.

The servants of the muses sped gladly to this cosy refuge, to the sun and the sea. It was difficult to find a better spot for swimmers.

The fine singer Ivan Kozlovsky spent his summer vacation here many years running. Barsova was also a frequent visitor. The stars of the Bolshoi Theatre were fond of this health-giving spot in the Crimea.

They would swim far out and sing arias and duets, an admiring audience for these unusual concerts gathering on the beach by the wave-drenched bronze statue of mermaid.

Their voices sounded even more impressive over the water. No concert hall, not even the best one, could compare with the natural acoustics of the sea.

Valeria Barsova and Ivan Kozlovsky said that vocal exercises in sea water had a beneficial effect on a singer's voice.

"Sun and sea—what could be more bracing for the voice?" said Barsova. "It's not surprising that Italy with its fine climate is so rich in singers."

In the summer of 1934, a crowd of famous singers, dancers, and actors gathered at Miskhor as usual.

The proximity of the sea and southern air always rouse the imagination and produce an excess of energy. In their search for entertainment, the holiday-makers at "Nyura" decided to celebrate an original anniversary, Kozlovsky's tenth summer at Miskhor.

Inspired by this idea a team of "sculptors" erected a "statue of Kozlovsky" in the garden early one morning. By a remarkable coincidence the team was led by a young artist whose surname was Baranov. So the inscription on the pedestal was a particularly apt one: "To Kozlovsky (Mr. Goat) from Baranov (Mr. Lamb)."

The objects used to build the statue included wooden poles, twigs, loofahs, pillows, sheets, blankets and even some kitchen utensils. Towering up among the southern vegetation, against the background of Ai-Petri, the ghost-like "monument" bore a striking resemblance to Apollo, yet at the same time was diabolically like Kozlovsky. Instead of a lyre he was holding the Roman figure X. The actors competed with the artists. The talented actor A. Kramov got together a comic choir of ragamuffins—like the Zaitsev brothers' choir which was quite well known at one time.

But everyone believed that the highlight of the programme would be a young actor from the Children's Theatre, Ilya Tervaki, who was rumoured to be Kozlovsky's serious rival and had a marvellous lyrical tenor voice. Some people even gloated: "We'll make rings round him." It was not difficult to guess who was the object of these unequivocal "threats".

That evening "Nyura" looked like a besieged fortress. The neighbouring holiday homes had got word of the "anniversary". The defences were down and a crowd of several hundred thronged by the open veranda which served as a stage. The celebrations were of a most informal nature. Humorous speeches were delivered, and the comic choir performed a cantata of greetings and a humorous song about a little grey Kozlik (a Kid) hinting at the singer's name—Kozlovsky.

Ivan Kozlovsky

But everyone was waiting for Teryaki. When the fair youth appeared with an accompanist he was given a loud ovation. Kozlovsky sat with a disgruntled expression, and after Teryaki's appearance, retired somewhat conspicuously, provoking some sarcastic remarks.

Teryaki began to sing. The southern sky glimmered with diamond-like stars, as it listened to the Indian guest's aria from Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Sadko*. The large audience was amazed at the splendid mastery of the young performer, his extraordinary ability to imitate not only Kozlovsky's singing, but even the timbre of his voice. In fact, his singing could not be called an imitation. We were witnessing the birth of a new Kozlovsky. The miracle had happened twice.

The audience greeted the end of the aria with an overwhelming ovation which drowned the splashing of the incoming tide.

At that moment Ivan Kozlovsky emerged from behind a screen at the back of the veranda and smilingly took his bow. It was only then that the audience realised they had been "taken for a ride". It had been Kozlovsky singing, and Teryaki merely mouthing the words and imitating the gestures, with great precision.

We later used this number at club *kapoustniks* and always with fantastic success. It could be matched perhaps only by an act performed by the Vakhtangov pair—the producer Yevgeny Simonov and the actor L. Ruslanov who subsequently left drama to become a singer. They gave an incredibly funny parody of a duet performed by Ivan Kozlovsky and Maxim Mikhailov.

Ruslanov sang the tenor part, giving a perfect imitation of Kozlovsky's concert mannerisms, while Simonov merely croaked in a bass, but nevertheless was remarkably like Mikhailov.

Dear Ivan Kozlovsky ... there is so much that one could say about him. I do not want to speak of him mainly as a singer and enthuse about his "top C". Let the music specialists do this, if they are able to reveal the secrets of Kozlovsky's captivating art.

Some have accused him of striving for external effects, of trying to be original. For example, he sings the famous romance "I Met You...", accompanied on the guitar, sitting in an arm chair, chin cupped in hand, recalling the past, as it were. The singer is lit by a floodlight or the standard lamp beside him....

Who but Kozlovsky could permit himself such blatantly primitive theatricals?

I once thought that of all the vocalists only Nadezhda Obukhova had this remarkable ability to revive forgotten or, the reverse,

hackneyed romances, making them sound like new, original works. Yet in Kozlovsky's performance as well many well-known romances sounded like newly-discovered fine specimens of vocal art, transformed by his remarkable talent.

Some music-lovers maintain that Kozlovsky often "saves" his voice by performing many arias and romances at concerts at "half-strength". I think this is not the case. Of course, he is *careful* with his voice, but only in a prophylactic way, guarding it against changes in the weather and treacherous draughts. Such is the constitution of the tenor. Basses are different. I once saw Maxim Mikhailov, hot and perspiring after a concert, climb onto the window-sill in his changing room, open the window in winter and take a deep breath of the icy air.

Kozlovsky cannot allow himself such "luxuries". Still he is always in good form, as they say. And if he includes some works, which are technically speaking not too complex, in his concert repertoire to "warm up", this is perfectly logical for a singer.

How many original plans are usually hatched by this splendid artist who hates cliches and "anything stale".

For instance, he was full of ideas for putting on *Faust* in Luzhniki.

"With Pirogov as Mephistopheles and me as Faust, with one thousand participants. The whole production has been planned in detail. It will go down in operatic history! And *The Barber of Seville* should be put on at the Central Art Workers' Club with all the members of the old guard: Reizen, Kozlovsky.... We'll only make an exception for the part of Rosine. But we'll even give all the small parts to the old, established names."

One could say a great deal about Kozlovsky's professional plans. But I should like to speak of some of his personal features.

The most touching thing about him is his remarkable thoughtfulness for people, his desire to revive the memory of forgotten talents, his ability to notice what others have failed to. How often he has dropped in to see me or phoned to remind the club to send a telegram of greetings for the anniversary of an elderly actor, prompter, theatre hairdresser or property-man.

"It's a simple sign of attention, you see.... And he (or she) will be so pleased! I've already sent one from myself...."

Kozlovsky once dropped in to see me after a concert by the inventive Hungarian illusionist Pal Pottasy. A short while ago he had been admiring the Hungarian's refined manner of fooling the audience and had gone onto the stage to thank him for the pleasure he had given. He had urged him to try his hand in operetta. Pottasy

really did remind one of an operetta simpleton. While he was talking about the Hungarian, he suddenly clasped his head:

"I nearly forgot! You're having a symphony concert tomorrow at the Central Club, the first performance of Alexander Yurassovsky's *Spring Symphony*. You probably know that he died very young, thirty years ago. Rachmaninov and Glière thought highly of him. What's more, he's the son of the famous Bolshoi singer Nadezhda Salina, who was one of the first to perform in Tchaikovsky's operas. She is now living at the Stage Veterans' House and will be at the concert tomorrow, in spite of her 93 years.... I shall definitely come to congratulate her. What would she like? Flowers.... No, chocolates would be better. The old people will get together in the Veterans' House in the morning, and she'll hand round her chocolates."

Next day Kozlovsky arrived before the concert. He said some warm words about the young composer who, but for his untimely death in 1922, might have won a place of honour among the great figures in Russian music. He greeted sincerely and simply the composer's mother sitting in the hall.

She rose from her seat and replied to Kozlovsky in a surprisingly youthful and resonant voice. In the music she had heard her son's voice, felt his creative maturity and re-experienced the acute pain of her loss as a mother.

Many people in the hall wept, including Kozlovsky....

Soon afterwards he was again preoccupied with a new problem: how to celebrate the seventieth birthday of that fine old compère Alexander Mendelevich, who was extremely popular in the theatre world.

Mendelevich was a most original figure — the grandfather of the Russian variety stage. His method was to talk absolute rubbish with a perfectly serious, straight face. The "aphorisms", amusing incidents, and funny telegrams which he recited on the stage made the audience laugh because of their absurdity. Here are some examples of his telegrams of greeting at a club evening:

"Greetings from the founders of Moscow. *Dolgoruky and Lev Nikulin*". "Congratulations. Understand all Central Club's activists married. Great pity. *Beryozka Dance Company*." "Congratulations. Inspiration not for sale, but manuscript can be sold. *Sergei Mikhalkov*." "Sending congratulations in pairs. Too difficult singly. *Mass and Chervinsky. Mironova and Menaker. Smirnov and Sokolsky*."

What amused audiences most was not the content of these telegrams, but the fact that their author, after delivering each of his opuses, would produce a laugh like a horse's neigh which added a

special touch to his "blathering". It was difficult to say whether he did this because he really believed in his wit, or whether it was a skilfully fashioned stage mask.

So it was in behalf of this Mohican of variety that Kozlovsky devoted much of his energy.

One of Ivan Kozlovsky's favourite pastimes was to pull his friends' legs. The things he got up to with the accompanist Walter, of whom he thought most highly as a musician and a person. Their friendship was constantly accompanied by Kozlovsky's "practical jokes" and their endless slanging-matches. Kozlovsky would ring his partner at home late at night without the slightest reason and express surprise at the fact that Walter was asleep. Walter got angry, but put up with it. One day he flew into a terrible rage at an official reception when he discovered a knife and fork which Kozlovsky had slipped into his pocket. Only the formal atmosphere of the reception forced Walter to avoid making a scene and content himself with hissing at Kozlovsky.

To this day Kozlovsky treats me as if I have always been his chief exploiter, and he is the martyr who suffers all manner of afflictions and unpleasantnesses from me. In fact, things are quite the reverse.

One characteristic trait has always been his inquisitorial manner towards people who are trying to persuade him to give a concert performance. Firstly, he never gives his consent immediately. You have to ring him time and time again, and on each occasion he invents some new delays: either he is about to leave on an imaginary guest tour, or he has to give a radio broadcast, or something else which he cannot possibly put off without preliminary discussion.

Finally you receive his consent to take part in the concert, but then a new stage begins in Kozlovsky's inexhaustible inventiveness. His imagination soars up, like a rocket, to the highest stage. He insists on being accompanied by an ensemble of twenty harps and singing a duet with either M. Mikhailov or G. Yaron. And his partner must also learn a special part. Or he has the idea of his singing to be accompanied by brass band. The next time he demands that the boys' choir led by A. Sveshnikov, or the guitarist Ivanov-Kramskoy be invited. And so on and so forth.

Kozlovsky's suggestions frequently encounter the indifference of administrators because such "versions" are not provided for in the plans and estimates of the philharmonia, radio and television.

Initiative gushes out of him in a hot stream, but sometimes cools

through lack of support, even in cases when it really deserves attention. Yet at the same time he is always full of surprises. It is difficult to guess what he will be up to next.

When I went to work in the Writers' Club my contacts with him continued and I often persuaded him to take part in concerts and various literary evenings.

In April 1961 Kozlovsky sang at a large evening devoted to the birth centenary of the famous Russian artist M. Nesterov whom he knew and loved.

I rang him at home. One of his relatives answered.

"Who is that? He's rehearsing (evidently he is always rehearsing!). Oh, it's you? Boris Mikhailovich? We'll tell him. (Pause). Just a moment.... He's coming...."

Kozlovsky's familiar voice comes on the line.

"Exploiter? It will probably be a long conversation. Wait, I'll get a chair."

"Get a cushion as well."

New pause while Kozlovsky makes himself comfortable.

"Well, what do you want? Why didn't you ring me when you should have invited me to grandad's anniversary?"

"Which grandad? My grandfather gave up the ghost a long time ago."

"I'm not talking about your grandfather, but Kornei Chukovsky. I prepared congratulations for him, but nobody invited me—so I didn't come. You don't know what make of tape recorder he has, do you? Find out the speed, if you don't mind. I'll send him a tape. He can play it at home."

"Alright, I'll find out. But I want you for another grandfather—Nesterov. We're organising a memorial evening for him. We must have you."

Kozlovsky agreed, but then followed a long conversation about what he was to sing.

"Nesterov spent some time in Italy," Kozlovsky mused aloud. "I'll sing something Italian."

"Please do, but don't forget something Russian too. We're commemorating the anniversary of Nesterov, not Leonardo da Vinci."

Then followed the usual discussion of various points concerning the performance. Whom to invite? The delightful singer Pisarenko for duets. The equally delightful violinist Golovina and the celebrated harpist Vera Dulova as accompanists. Or the Japanese violinist Yoko Sato?

At the evening Kozlovsky sang Tchaikovsky's romances, Beethoven's "Marmotte", the aria "The Sun Lies Low" and, finally, the promised duet with Pisarenko. He was a tremendous success. His voice sounded magnificently. You could tell he was pleased with himself.

I went backstage to thank him. Kozlovsky had the habit of "cooling down" after a concert.

I caught him at the moment when he was working out a new method of presenting anniversary greetings.

"Why is this more interesting for the person in question? Because the singer's art usually leaves no trace. Our work is like tobacco smoke coming out of a pipe. But a tape recording can be kept by a person for a long time and played by him even when he deserves to be cursed to high heaven instead of honoured."

Kozlovsky spares neither time nor energy when it is a question of pleasing someone he likes on the occasion of the latter's anniversary. It must be said that the process of recording takes him as much time as it would to sing at five anniversary celebrations at least.

That evening he and I reminisced about the meetings in the Pimenovsky Cellar and our visit together to Riga in 1947 where I took him in a Central Club team.

It was the first visit to Riga by Moscow artists after the Second World War. A Douglas aeroplane was put at our disposal and three hours later we were in the Latvian capital.

The team's composition was somewhat unusual. We took with us not only concert performers, but also members of a special issue of the oral magazine "Life News", including the world weight-lifting champion Grigory Novak. We also had the compère Mikhail Garkavi and the variety actress Rina Zelyonaya.

We were given rooms at the Metropol Hotel. That day we had a concert-meeting at the Opera Theatre with local celebrities in the arts, and the following day two performances, one for the army and the other in the House of Arts.

On arrival the whole group met in Kozlovsky's room. Then he got up to his usual tricks.

"What a nice director we have! Can't even arrange a boat trip along the Gulf of Riga, to say nothing of the Baltic. When I was at the Black Sea the naval command put a torpedo-boat at my disposal. Our group leader there was splendid. He knew how to drop the word to the right person."

A waiter brought in several bottles of champagne.

Ivan Kozlovsky and the Japanese violinist Yoko Sato singing at the Central Writers' Club

"Give the bill to the group leader!" Kozlovsky said casually. "It's on him today."

Whereupon he slipped the waiter some money unobtrusively.

While Kozlovsky was proposing the toasts I whispered a few words to Garkavi and he then left the room. A minute later the phone rang. I answered it.

"The adjutant of the Baltic Fleet Commander would like to speak to Kozlovsky."

Kozlovsky rushed to the phone and heard the following:

"Captain Garkavenko reporting! The Fleet Commander has ordered me to convey his greetings. We are delighted to have you in Riga. Would you like to make a short trip along the Gulf? The Commander has ordered that a cruiser be put at your disposal."

"Thank you, Comrade Captain! Kindly express my gratitude to the Commander. Am I right in thinking that you are a Ukrainian?"

"Aye, aye, sir. From Poltava. Perhaps you don't want a cruiser? The Commander told us to keep a submarine standing by too in case you prefer it!"

"Thank you again! I think I prefer a cruiser. How nice to talk to a fellow countryman. I'm from Poltava too." Then followed a short exchange in Ukrainian.

"Right, sir! Allow me to report for talks!"

"Please do."

Putting his hand over the mouthpiece Kozlovsky turned to us triumphantly.

"Just imagine! No sooner had I mentioned it than the fleet rang up. And without a word from our dear director."

When the conversation was over Garkavi entered the room, saluted and announced:

"Captain Garkavenko at your service, sir!"

On the return journey from Riga in the same plane Kozlovsky took his revenge.

Knowing that I was in a hurry to get back to Moscow, he and the plane's chief pilot produced a mock radio-telegram on a special form to the effect that Moscow Airport could not receive us due to weather conditions and that the plane was to change course and land in Murmansk.

Murmansk caused some surprise, of course, but the official telegram form and the serious expression of the pilot who showed it to me were most convincing.

The second episode concerned not only me but all the other passengers. The chief pilot put Kozlovsky at the controls and stayed next to him in the second pilot's seat.

Kozlovsky fairly quickly felt himself to be an experienced pilot, not suspecting that the auto-pilot had been switched on. All the same we had a few bumps. Everything would have been all right if one of the passengers, who happened to be a public prosecutor, had not made a fuss. He protested most irately at the fact that the passengers' lives had been irresponsibly put in the hands of an opera singer. The plane's chief pilot was forced to expel Kozlovsky from the pilot seat.

Recalling this air incident Kozlovsky seems to re-experience all the humour of the situation and bursts into peals of ringing, youthful laughter.

Before leaving anywhere he usually makes all his concert partners observe the old custom of sitting down for a moment in silence. Then

he picks up his remarkable brief-case with music. It really is an unusual one. You feel it must possess the mysterious, unknown qualities of a magic talisman. If not, who would dare appear in public with such a battered object, tied round with string and sporting a wire handle which has long since replaced the original leather one. This brief-case is so dilapidated that I once photographed it without Kozlovsky's knowledge and am keeping the picture as a souvenir.

Dear Kozlovsky. Surely, one cannot help loving his delightful jokes and eccentricities? There are diamonds galore in the man!

A MAGICIAN AND HIS PUPPETS

To provide a literary portrait of an artist, no matter what his sphere, is a difficult task indeed.

Can words reproduce the sounds flowing from under the fingers of Svyatoslav Richter or Igor Oistrakh? Can even the most talented description give an adequate idea of the singing of Chaliapin or Nezhdanova? Can the most authentic essay recreate the unique stage acting of V. Davydov, V. Kachalov or S. Kuznetsov?

Today art which used to leave traces on paper only — in critical reviews and the reminiscences of contemporaries — is most fortunate. The sound cinema and tape recordings have made it possible to record not only the skill of individual actors and musicians but even whole productions — plays, operas, etc. The importance of cinematic and sound recordings of art for subsequent generations is very great. This can be seen even now when one looks at films of the 1920s and 1930s, which are far from perfect. The opportunity to see and hear the masters of the past on the screen and in sound recordings provides lovers of the theatre and music, and also specialists in various spheres of art, with far more than abstract descriptions by the critic, art historian or memoir writer.

But in the case of a living artist at the height of his creative powers surely it would be simpler to try and see his work for oneself and form an opinion of it from one's own personal impressions. For this reason I would ask the reader in advance not to expect my sketch to be an exhaustive description of the artist to whom these lines are dedicated. All the more so because he is a person who combines the

talent of an actor, producer and writer with the temperament of an active public figure. A person who has produced books about his own art and films using his own scripts. This remarkable person entered the arts as a painter, tried his hand in the musical and drama theatres, and found his true calling in the puppet theatre.

Sergei Obraztsov, People's Artist of the USSR, is a man with an interesting biography. His work does not fit into any stereotyped pattern.

Forty years ago, when home-made puppets were only a student hobby for him and by no means a profession, no one would have dreamed that they would bring him world-wide fame. Who would have thought that he and his puppets would make triumphal journeys through the capitals and many towns of America, Britain and France and win the affection of audiences in all the socialist countries.

At the end of the 1920s Obraztsov's puppets became enormously popular, at first among the artistic intelligentsia and then with audiences at large. In variety it is an artist's originality, uniqueness, which brings success, his creative personality, the distinctive nature of his skill.

Obraztsov's discovery was that he used a literary device of fable-writers, investing his puppet cats, dogs and tigers with human characters. He left it to the audience to draw a moral from his acts. For the first time dogs and cats performed old romances, and the unforgettable Tyapa, a baby with an incredibly funny face and a bare back which was actually Obraztsov's hand—carried on a mimed dialogue with a singer who was performing Moussorgsky's "Lullaby". Obraztsov's remarkable art, ironic by nature, ridiculed vulgarity in people and stereotypes in art, yet at the same time contained lyrical elements and a gentle humour.

I remember the young Obraztsov of the early 1930s, a mischievous, gay participant in the numerous *kapoustniks* organised by the Masters of Arts' Club. He had not yet won the fame and honorary titles which *compel* a man to make new "achievements and discoveries". The things he got up to in his youth! It was the club cellar in Staropimenovsky Alley that witnessed the birth of his parody puppet of Felix Kon, the head of the Main Arts Department, an old revolutionary, brilliant orator and favourite of the Moscow artistic intelligentsia. Imitating Kon's intonation and voice modulations, the puppet gave a "speech" about the lullaby. This was not only a friendly take-off of the likable Felix Kon, but also a caustic satire on the supporters of the Association of Proletarian Musicians,

Sergei Obraztsov

Sergei Obraztsov

disbanded soon afterwards, which denied the importance of the classical heritage and underestimated folk music. Referring to these pathetic musical theoreticians, the puppet asserted that "the Soviet lullaby, unlike the bourgeois lullaby, should wake the child up".

At club *kapoustniks* Kon frequently requested Obraztsov to repeat this act for him.

It was at the club evening devoted to the famous Papanin four that Obraztsov's "White Bear" first saw the light of day. With his powerful head and paws protruding from behind a screen, the beast opened his great pink mouth and sang an old romance (but to different words) with heart-rending melancholy, as if remembering the heroes who had left the icefloe.

This lovable Polar bear became a figure in Obraztsov's repertoire for many years and was warmly received by every audience. Soon afterwards the artist invented a new puppet in the form of the frantic conductor of a comic instrumental ensemble of young winners of international and Soviet music competitions. The ensemble included such great names as E. Gilels, D. Oistrakh, Y. Flière, L. Oborin,

M. Fikhtengolts, V. Dulova, S. Furer, and M. Kozolupova. They deliberately hit some excruciating wrong notes, considerably aided and abetted in this by the puppet conductor who was manipulated by Obraztsov. But this merely made the act more successful with professional audiences.

In 1935, as already mentioned, Obraztsov showed his puppets to Stanislavsky. It was in Stanislavsky's house in Leontyevsky Alley, where the great producer received his first delegation from the Masters of Arts' Club.

I shall never forget how enthusiastically he reacted to Obraztsov's art and how infectiously he laughed.

"I have the impression that your puppets know more about my system than some of my actors do!" he remarked jokingly to Obraztsov when the concert was over.

To Obraztsov's credit, constant success as a variety performer did not go to his head, but rather gave him the idea of setting up his own puppet theatre where he could also try his hand as a producer. His fourteen years first in the Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theatre and later in the Second Moscow Art Theatre had taught him to be most exacting towards himself and had shaped his artistic principles. Personal contact with Nemirovich-Danchenko and his pupils I. Bersenev, S. Birman, S. Giatsintova, and L. Baratov were of fundamental importance in developing Obraztsov's talent. It is with great respect and gratitude that he recalls Vakhtangov's comrade-in-arms Xenia Kotlubai, a producer at the Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theatre. Obraztsov regards her as his mentor in the field of acting and producing. There is no doubt that his many lessons in the "live" theatre had an influence on his work in the puppet theatre. But the pupil himself was an eager and capable learner.

One's idea of any person is usually formed in the process of learning about his professional and public activities.

The concepts of professional and public are inseparable in the work of the writer, composer, painter, producer and actor. Obraztsov is first and foremost a highly intelligent Soviet artist. His art, imbued with the ideals of humanism, is vivid confirmation of this.

In the "live" theatre we know of many instances when the characters in plays are turned by the producer or actor into cold, inanimate puppets. Excessive striving for formal devices, lack of attention to the ideological essence of a play or role result in a loss of the human thought and emotion intended by the dramatist.

Obraztsov succeeded in achieving the impossible in his art: he

brought his puppets to life, he made them live a full-blooded life on the stage, taught them to love and hate, to laugh and cry, to perform heroic deeds and bad actions. And all this is done for a single purpose: to assert goodness and justice. Obraztsov is guided by high moral principles in his productions for children and adults alike. His satirical productions and variety acts are aimed against stagnation and vulgarity in life and art; his publicist films champion peace and understanding between peoples. Incidentally, the documentary cinema and also photography have become objects of serious study by Obraztsov. In both he is fascinated and inspired by the power of the fact, life's truth, which sometimes have a far more convincing impact than attempts to "portray" the truth through artistic media.

One result of Obraztsov's interest in the documentary cinema was his film *The Wonderful World Around Us*, a fascinating story about nature and people, about many things which deserve our careful attention.

Then followed the film *The Cine Camera Accuses*. This is a cinematic accusation of great force aimed against the modern barbarism of the capitalist world, against war and the cynicism of bourgeois society.

Mention must be made of one more aspect of Obraztsov's art — his talent as a story-teller. His subjects are not limited to the arts. Frequent guest tours to other countries and meetings with numerous people varying greatly in social standing and character, and the powers of observation characteristic of writers and journalists have been instrumental in developing Obraztsov's interesting manner of expressing his ideas orally. His accounts of trips abroad, unusually lively and penetrating, contain, as a rule, psychological characterisations of the people he encountered. Yet at the same time they are not objectivist appraisals of phenomena and events, not impartial statements of fact. Obraztsov puts a great deal of emotion and passion into his talks. They are dominated by a single idea: the cause of peace must triumph. Bridges must be built between nations!

In 1963-1964 Obraztsov spent three months in the United States and Canada. He was in the USA at the time when President Kennedy was assassinated. America was in turmoil.

Obraztsov's camera clicked constantly. And he has a perfect command of the art of photography, the true talent of the press photographer.

In order to gain Obraztsov's consent to give a talk, I sent a telegram to him in the USA during his guest tour and received an affirmative reply.

Obraztsov returned to Moscow on February 22, 1964 and delivered his talk to a crowded audience in the Central Writers' Club. Everyone listened to his three-hour account with bated breath. It was also then that he described how the Russian émigrés whom he had met there had gone to seed. He played a tape-recording addressed to Soviet colleagues by the émigré actor Belostotsky who worked in the Stanislavsky Musical Theatre in the 1930s. It was a real *cri de coeur* from a man who realised what a fatal mistake he had made in leaving his homeland.

Obraztsov comes from the Russian intelligentsia. He is the son of Academician Vladimir Obraztsov, the famous Soviet specialist, a major expert in the field of railway construction.

After the October Revolution Obraztsov Sr. unhesitatingly devoted his efforts to the young state of workers and peasants.

Sergei Obraztsov describes his father as follows: "He was my first teacher in everything. When Soviet power was established he never came into the slightest conflict with it. On the floor of my father's room lay plans for building railways, and these plans extended far beyond the front lines of the Civil War, because Father sensed the tremendous growth of our country in the future. And this was not easy for the intelligentsia at that time. It meant arguments with some comrades and suspicions and boycotts from those of little faith. My father's conclusion that it was essential to work with Soviet power was not dictated by selfish motives, but by a sense of duty to the people who had carried out the October Revolution."

The Obraztsov family followed the traditions common to the progressive Russian intellectuals in the late 19th and early 20th century. They hated the tsarist regime and supported the ideals of the revolution. In the sphere of artistic taste his family had no time for mannered and decadent art. They admired Tolstoy, Chekhov and Repin, worshipped Chaliapin, adored the Art Theatre, and enjoyed singing old romances, Russian and Ukrainian folk songs. But all this was not carried to extremes. It was simply and naturally a part of their everyday life.

It is no accident that Sergei Obraztsov says he is "very precise" in his background: his mother was an impoverished noblewoman, his father a *raznochinets* (an intellectual of common birth.— *Ed.*), his grandmother the owner of a small estate in Moscow, and her children were also from "Chekhov's" world—an agronomist, a doctor, an engineer, and a town schoolmistress.

Incidentally, Grandma Kapa, as she was called, had a considerable influence on her grandson by teaching him to observe and love

nature. Sergei Obraztsov has preserved his love of all living things to this day, and it is reflected both in his art and in his domestic interests which sometimes have a somewhat exotic touch. In his theatre, Obraztsov has set up an excellent puppet museum. At home he has created a strange world of "wonders": he is surrounded by Siamese cats, rare fish in aquariums and even two live crocodiles which were given to him during his guest tour of America by his old friend, with whom he studied at the Higher School of Arts and Technology, Boris Chaliapin, the son of the famous singer.

"What on earth do you need crocodiles for?" I asked him.

"Mainly for my biography," he joked. "People ask me what will happen when they grow big. I reply that even when a man gets married he doesn't know what his future will be like.... It's easier to get rid of crocodiles! I have been told that they will try to eat me one day. That's not a bad finishing touch to a biographical sketch, is it?"

I am sure that Obraztsov's unusual home surroundings are the result not so much of eccentricity as of constant inquisitiveness, the desire to observe the peculiarities of the animal kingdom close at hand.

Obraztsov the writer is busy working on a new book entitled *The Baton of Art.* A few chapters have been published in the magazine *Iskusstvo kino* (*The Art of the Cinema*). A great deal in this book sounds paradoxical, which is characteristic of Obraztsov's way of thinking. But it touches on serious problems concerning the further development of art and the interaction of its various types and forms. For example, are the cinema and television ousting modern forms of the theatre? On what should the fine arts focus their attention?

Of course, the book contains a great deal that is debatable, but the main point is the artist's constant concern for the future of socialist art.

Herein lies the essense of Sergei Obraztsov.

ODESSAN "PLENIPOTENTIARY"

When Leonid Utyosov was told that I intended to write a sketch about him, he said somewhat ironically:

"On one condition: that you emphasise my brilliance. Then I'll give any interview. Alright?"

I used the Odessan system of countering a question with another question:

"When and where have you really felt a victim of your own popularity?"

Utyosov gave an Art Theatre pause.

"Unfortunately it was in my native Odessa. One day I was getting into a taxi to go to a concert, when an effusive Odessan lady rushed up, dragging a young lad behind her. Throwing open the taxi door, she shouted loudly:

"'Yasha! Listen here! This is Utyosov in the flesh! Look quick. By the time you're grown up, he might be dead.'"

Joking aside, Utyosov's popularity is tremendous. This fine Soviet actor and "chansonnier" is known from films, radio and television, millions of gramophone records and, finally, from his concert and theatre performances.

He receives thousands of letters from admirers, including some rather strange ones with unexpected addresses like: Utyosov, The Kremlin, Moscow.

The writers assume, obviously, that such a famous artist could only live in the Kremlin.

But there is also another category of spectator—the nosy ones, who are interested mostly in intimate details about the lives of famous artists and gladly pick up any scraps of scandal about them.

"Lenny Utyosov? Don't you know—drinks like a fish! Pure alcohol. By the tumbler! One in the morning and two before he goes on stage. Saw it myself!"

These lovers of "sensations" could not care less that Utyosov does not drink at all and even upsets his friends by his strict sobriety.

These flippant phrases "saw it myself" or "heard it myself" mean nothing in the mouths of such people, for it is impossible to find their source. Yet occasionally they deceive even the memoirist.

I wish to avoid being reproached, to put it mildly, for inaccuracies in my account of Leonid Utyosov. Therefore I shall try to adhere strictly to the facts.

My first impression of Leonid Utyosov and his brilliant talent goes back almost half a century.

It was in the Recreation Park in Leningrad. The variety theatre there was announcing the first guest performances by a singer of satirical songs called Utyosov from Odessa.

Before the audience appeared a good-looking young man in the slightly stylised dress of a newspaper vendor: the regulation double-breasted jacket, close-fitting trousers and small peaked cap. A sack of newspapers was slung over his shoulder. He was rhythmical, musical, sang saucily, and danced with ease.

Leningraders are said to be chary of praise, but they gave Utyosov a very warm reception. The Summer Theatre in the Park had one full house after another. The signs "tickets sold out" were to accompany Utyosov throughout his artistic career. Even in the grave year of 1941, during the war, his guest performances continued without a break, now in the Hermitage Garden in Moscow, and the theatre was always packed. Air-raid warnings would interrupt the concert for a while, but then the audience returned from the shelters and demanded that the show go on. And Utyosov, who was then appearing with his jazz band, would give a specially spirited rendering of the "Ballad of an Unknown Sailor", "Many a Time We've Taught the Foe", and "Partisan Morozko". The programme which he had compiled quickly bore the challenging title of "Beat the Enemy!".

But let us return to the 1920s, when Utyosov's "Leningrad period" began. He moved to Leningrad because he thought of it not only as a theatre town, but also as the most beautiful city—apart from Odessa, of course.

Leonid Utyosov

The poet Vassily Lebedev-Kumach and the composer Isaak Dunayevsky

Leningrad was the town of the October Revolution, the historic salvo of the *Aurora*, the revolutionary traditions of the sailors. Were not these traditions linked with the feat of battleship *Potemkin*? Was it not a Black Sea wind that had wafted them to the Baltic?

There was even much in common between the classical architecture of Leningrad and that of Odessa. And did not the shadow of Pushkin link the two towns?

Yet wherever Utyosov is, wherever he lives, Odessa always regards him as its "plenipotentiary", irrespective of where he is registered. And Utyosov has never forgotten his native town, extolling it in his songs, in different ways, at different times.

The artist's sense of "Odessan patriotism" has never left him, and I remember how proud he was when Odessa was awarded the honorary title of hero city!

Nor does he forget, incidentally, the years spent in Leningrad where he found his stage personality by progressing through various degrees of mastery in the Free Theatre, the Leningrad Satire Theatre, and the Music Hall, until he decided to set up a Soviet jazz band. From 1929 onwards he became firmly established as a variety singer.

For more than forty years he has "walked through life", with his songs — lyrical and stirring, comic and dramatic, evoking feelings of tenderness and summoning people to battle. Naturally, his work also contained "youthful excesses", but are these worthy of recall? Is it not better to recall how his songs reverberated in the hearts of loving couples and the minds of soldiers smiting the foe?

Music critics call Utyosov the "propagandist of the Soviet song". But he is not only a "propagandist". He is the *creator* of Soviet songs which have won the hearts of millions of people. He is the initiator of the creative collaboration between the poet and song writer V. Lebedev-Kumach and the outstanding composer I. Dunayevsky. And he is co-author of many songs based on his ideas, his suggestions and his advice which influenced not only the text of the song but also its melodic pattern, rhythm and tempo.

Just as a talented producer with a profound understanding of the laws of the stage influences the dramatist who brings his play to the theatre, so Utyosov would detect the weak spots in songs and convince poets and composers of the need to make the necessary changes.

How often he found that a composer's excellent melody by far excelled the insipid text of the poet. Or brilliant words paled because of a weak, dull melody.

One cannot approach Utyosov with the usual yard-stick which determines a vocalist's calibre. With his voice it would be ridiculous to demand the *bel canto* school from him. Yet if one translates *bel canto* literally from Italian as beautiful singing, Utyosov's performance contains a great deal of beauty, a very special beauty which is found only in him, in his individual style. It is the slightly muffled timbre of the voice and yet the depths of feeling, the unusually expressive way in which he conveys the content of the song, and the remarkable subtlety and richness of intonation.

What brings a person to the stage? Calling. What establishes the true artist in his profession? Talent and hard work. Woe to him who lacks talent and tries to become an artist or painter driven by his vain hope alone; he will have to experience many bitter disappointments before he realises his mistake.

Love of music and song manifested itself in Utyosov at an early age. In addition he possessed that great gift of nature — talent, which had not yet fully awoken, but was already putting out shoots.

"I loved music, but was studying at the Feig School of Commerce!" exclaimed Utyosov, recalling his childhood.

In families far removed from stage circles, a young person's desire for a stage career almost invariably meets with opposition.

"No man is a prophet in his own land", let alone his own, patriarchal family. Nevertheless the history of the theatre shows that most outstanding actors went on the stage against the advice of their closest relatives, who wanted to see them as doctors, engineers, teachers, craftsmen or book-keepers. "It's important to have a profession in life!" these relatives say.

Utyosov's youth followed this stereotyped pattern, the only difference being that he acquired "higher education without secondary schooling", as he says half-jokingly about himself.

The Heinrich Feig School was famous for accepting anyone who had been expelled from other secondary educational establishments, even those who were classed as "politically unreliable".

Utyosov had the honour of being the only person ever expelled from this school. The reason was his more than irreverent attitude to the rabbi who taught the Old Testament in the school.

Vocation never emerges in a person by itself. Utyosov's overwhelming interest in music developed under the influence of the virtuoso playing of the Odessan violinist Gershberg, by the door of whose apartment the young Utyosov would stand for hours listening to the magical sounds. He never missed an opportunity to hear concerts by Italian and Rumanian orchestras which played regularly in Odessa by the statue of Richelieu.

For all the shortcomings of the Feig School amateur art activities were developed there.

It had a symphony orchestra, an orchestra of Russian folk instruments, a choir, and a drama club. All this created a special atmosphere in which Utyosov found it easier and more pleasant to breathe than in scripture lessons. He also took violin lessons and was leader in the school choir.

After he was expelled from the Feig School Utyosov went to work as a clown in Borodanov's farcical circus. With his four years of schooling he stood out there for his "education".

From then onwards everything was achieved by self-education, learning from life, for he possessed a natural wit and the desire to learn not truisms but everything directly concerned with the spiritual interests of an intelligent, observant person.

Naturally Utyosov did not attain mastery overnight. His work as a professional actor began in 1912 in the Kremenchug Miniatures Theatre. He was taken on by the troupe through the intercession of friends, and goodness only knew what would come of the

Vladimir Khenkin and Leonid Utyosov

experiment. He came up against natural obstacles, as any person lacking a dramatic training would. The first period was one of imitation, copying his partners.

The second period — accidentally found make-up, a new external image, and an independent decision to find the inner essence of the role which corresponded to this image. Then Utyosov was invited to join the Odessa Miniatures Theatre where he met Vladimir Khenkin who was already established as a reciter of funny stories.

Khenkin was considerably older. He had great stage experience and self-confidence, his own striking individual style, his special manner on the stage. Yet he was not only a story-teller or reciter. There was much to be learned from him as an actor, too, even in the frivolous worthless repertoire of the pre-revolutionary theatres of miniatures.

So in 1913 both actors became partners in a silly but amusing miniature entitled *The American Duel*, and twenty-five years later they performed the same play at the Moscow Masters of Arts'

Club as an example of what they had to act in those far-off days in Odessa.

I remember how this *Duel* with its bloodless end turned into a real duel of two famous variety performers on the club stage, and it is hard to say who "outplayed" whom on this memorable evening. Each of the partners introduced so many unexpected, improvised elements into his acting and their performances were so full of mischievous tricks that the audience, which included some outstanding personalities in the world of arts, gave them a loud ovation for their magnificent skill in the comedy genre.

In the Odessa Miniatures Theatre Utyosov also made the acquaintance of the talented comedy actor Pavel Pol.

Khenkin, Pol and Anna Arends, who had helped the young Utyosov in his first steps on the stage back in the Kremenchug Theatre, were all first-class actors. There was plenty for the budding actor to learn from them.

It is interesting that fate brought Khenkin and Pol together again in the 1930s and 1940s in the Moscow Satire Theatre. Soon after the end of the Second World War I worked with these fine actors as theatre director. I was also linked with them by personal friendship which had formed during our joint work in the Masters of Arts' Club.

I must note, however, that my work as director of the Theatre of the Revolution (later the Moscow Mayakovsky Theatre) and the Satire Theatre convinced me that it is far more pleasant to have dealings with actors in the social atmosphere of a club than in the role of administrator.

Once I asked Leonid Utyosov which of his songs he liked best and which of his performances he regarded as the most memorable.

"One's liking for songs depends to a large extent on the period. I have liked different songs at different periods. But perhaps my favourite is 'The Sea Spreads Wide', possibly because it was I who brought it to life. And my most memorable concert was the first night of the programme 'Music Shop'. Not only because this programme was so popular with the public. It was tremendously important for my jazz band because it solved the problem of the theatralised concert in which each musician was an actor at the same time. Bringing out these acting skills in the musicians produced some excellent results, which made it possible to create the interesting genre of the dramatised concert. What is more, 'Music Shop' was a

Vladimir Khenkin, Leonid Utyosov, Yevgeny Zharkovsky and Modest Tabachnikov at the Central Art Workers' Club

great help to producer Grigory Alexandrov in making the film *Jolly Fellows.*

This first Soviet musical comedy on the screen made stars of Lyubov Orlova and Leonid Utyosov.

In 1966 I played a modest part in a gala concert by Utyosov televised in Moscow's Central Actors' Club.

Leonid Utyosov was playing the role of a host receiving his friends, eminent Moscow actors. He sang songs "for them", as it were, and they acted "for him". The programme was most amusing and interesting. I was to read my reminiscences of Mayakovsky, because Utyosov had met him at the Masters of Arts' Club.

Television producers like trying to organise an "intimate" atmosphere with everyone behaving naturally in front of the cameras. Unfortunately, they do not always succeed. and the audience frequently feels that this "intimate touch" has been very carefully rehearsed, like many other TV "improvisations".

On this occasion a steaming samovar had been placed in the drawing room where the programme was being filmed, and Utyosov was to offer each actor a cup of tea after his performance. During the

last rehearsal he had an idea for varying his "invitation to tea" and said to me:

"Listen, when you finish reading from your 'memoirs' I'll say 'You are to get a cup of tea too, but without lemon, because you were reading and not reciting from memory.'"

I was forced to agree, but in the interval between the rehearsal and the beginning of the broadcast I realised that I would cut a somewhat sorry figure after this line of Utyosov's. What could be done? I had to rush to the cafe, buy a lemon and slip it into my pocket just in case, for I was still hoping that Utyosov would change his mind.

However, as soon as I had finished reading, Utyosov pronounced the sacramental phrase.

I had to resort to the counterattack, fish the lemon out of my pocket and reply that I had not expected much from his hospitality, and had therefore brought my own lemon.

Even such a past master at "leg-pulling" as Utyosov had not expected this. All the other "guests" were convinced that this improvised dialogue had been secretly rehearsed.

When the broadcast was over Utyosov asked me jokingly:

"You don't happen to come from Odessa, do you?"

And I realised that this was the highest praise for my unexpected retort.

A man develops not only in the process of his professional and public activities. His private life also moulds this or that trait of his character.

Leonid Utyosov's loyal life's companion and true friend for many years was his wife Yelena. Variety artists are by their very nature rather anarchic people.

Dramatic actors are to a large extent disciplined by their work in a team. The variety artist is left mainly to himself, as a kind of "lone wolf". Even the fact that he is registered with a concert organisation does not always help to remove the egocentricity and individualistic tendencies which are unfortunately developed in the variety world. These qualities are not shared by all variety artists, of course. But remember the period when Utyosov began to work on the variety stage—the 1920s and 1930s when no one even dreamt of carrying on edifying work among variety performers.

This is the reason why I mentioned Yelena Utyosova, who departed early from this life. She was an intelligent, kind-hearted, and strongwilled wife who had a positive influence on Utyosov's life.

Yes, it can be said without a doubt that she was the producer of his life, she helped him overcome the many temptations and difficulties of his profession, to avoid cheap success. She was an actress herself, and a talented one at that, but she left her work in the theatre to help develop the talent of Leonid Utyosov, for whom she felt a devoted admiration, although outwardly adopted a calm and critical attitude towards him. Perhaps it is to his friend and wife that Utyosov owes many of the lyrical traits in his work — and the fact that an irresistible urge occasionally makes him take up his pen to express his feelings in verse. He writes these poems for himself, not for publication. His only published writings are autobiographical reminiscences and short stories about his native Odessa.

Utyosov's lyricism is devoid of pessimism. Throughout his life he has preserved the southern temperament of an Odessan, his good humour and love of jokes, penchant for imitation, the ability to involve the person with whom he is talking in a kind of game. Particularly when he meets people of his own age and from his native parts.

One day I witnessed a competition between Utyosov and the film director Mark Donskoi to see who could remember more "sights" of old Odessa — an "Odessa quiz".

"What was the best sweet-shop in Odessa before 1917?"

"Boniface's! And where was the best ice-cream in the world?"

"At the Palais Royal Cafe owned by Pechessky. Which of the best cafes can you remember?"

"Fanconi's and Rabin's. And who owned the music shop?"

"Iozofer's! Who owned the stationer's?"

"There were two — two rival ones: Franz Mach and Ivan Mach!"

And so on until their memories were exhausted.

The humour in Utyosov's short stories about old Odessa! For instance, he gets into an overcrowded tram. Suddenly a heart-rending cry from a young Odessa woman drowns the passengers' noisy conversation. "What's the matter? You are not feeling well?" they ask her sympathetically. The girl bursts into bitter tears. Someone has stolen her purse in the crush. Again the lively interest. "How much money did you have in it?" Twenty kopecks, it transpires. Utyosov gallantly takes out a twenty-kopeck coin and gives it to the girl: "Only please don't cry." The girl calms down, but on getting out of the tram comes up to Utyosov and says timidly: "Would you give me the purse back too, please?"

Utyosov has hundreds of stories like that from real life and at any moment he can produce a cascade of amusing episodes from his life

in Odessa. He does all this with a feeling of special tenderness for his town and its customs.

And the city reciprocates the feelings of its "plenipotentiary".

On Utyosov's seventieth birthday another favourite of Odessa, the operetta singer Mikhail Vodyanoi, came onto the stage of the Variety Theatre in Moscow with greetings from the people of their native city.

He brought Utyosov a huge bottle of Black Sea water and some "Odessa air" in a big balloon. And, finally, he handed him a delicious stuffed pike from Odessa's "Orthodox Christians".

HAPPY NEW CENTURY!

So my book has come to an end. I ask the forgiveness of those whom I have met on my path and not mentioned on its pages.

The author is indebted to them, and if age permits and memory does not fail, I shall try to repay my debt.

Thirty years separate us from the end of the Second World War, the most destructive and bloody war in history, which took twenty million lives in our country alone.

The hard, unforgettable years of struggle against the nazi invasion are far behind. The appeals for peace on earth, for friendship among nations in the name of human progress for all mankind sound ever louder and more insistently. With each year people become more aware of the ideals of noble humanism and of the struggle for moral self-perfection. Those of whom I have written in my reminiscences also devoted their lives to disseminating these ideals.

I remember a December evening in 1959 in one of the lounges at the Central Art Workers' Club in Moscow.

I had invited a small group of actors, painters and musicians to discuss how to organise our New Year celebration. Among the invited were people of the older generation who liked not only making merry, but also philosophising. For elderly people each year is not only a past stage, but also an opportunity to cast a retrospective glance at the whole of their past lives.

On this occasion the conversation centred not only on the past but on the future.

Seeing in the New Year, 1960, at the Central Art Workers' Club. Boris Filippov as Snow Maiden and Leonid Utyosov as Father Frost

"Here we are, my friends, sitting together and planning how to see in 1960," said Leonid Utyosov, chairman of our committee. "I do not doubt that we shall organise the festivities with a professional understanding of the matter. What is more, I offer my services as Father Frost, on condition that Filippov is the Snow Maiden. He's just right for the role, particularly with his glasses on.... But let us not think only of ourselves. Let us spare a thought for our successors — the art workers of the twenty-first century! I don't know yet how to do it, but I should like our great-grandsons to feel the atmosphere of our New Year meeting."

"Excellent idea," M. Ladur, People's Artist, took him up. "Let's approve an address at our evening to art workers who see in the year 2000 at their Club."

"I suggest that at least part of our evening should be taperecorded and somehow preserved for them too," added Yaron. "Let them see that their ancestors knew how to work and play!"

Thus the Address to Our Successors was born, with which I should like to close my book:

"Greetings, dear Comrades and Friends,

Toast to the year 2000

"Greetings, citizens of the great year 2000.

"From the distant, but glorious past, in the first hour of 1960 we, workers in the arts, convey to you, our children and grandchildren, all our affection and send you all the best that we possess. We are sure that art, which brings people the joy of being initiated into the world of the beautiful, will live as long as mankind. True, much will change. You will probably celebrate the year 2000 in another fine building unlike our Central Art Workers' Club. Obviously, the music of joy and merry-making will resound at your evening too, and you will watch a 'space' newsreel broadcast from other planets on your large television screens.

"Much will have changed by then. You will not know what war is. Only do not let your feelings change. Let the artist's heart be even more many-faceted, let it breathe with freshness and thirst for creativity! Give its riches to the people, as our generation did.

"In this hall there are veterans of the arts, who have marched with the people ever since the Great October Socialist Revolution.

"Many of those present at our evening to greet 1960 fought for your happiness in the Great Patriotic War. The victories of the Soviet people contain a grain of our labour too.

"Perhaps we did not do everything that ought to have been done. Do not censure us for this!

"Raise your wine glasses in 2000 to your fathers and grandfathers. To the glorious past from the heights of the magnificent present!

"We propose a toast to you, to all workers in the arts who champion the ideals of progress and humanism, to friendship among nations, to peace throughout the world, to mankind of the twenty-first century!

"Can you hear the noise in the halls of our Art Workers' Club in 1960?

"There are some young people here who will be fortunate to tell you about this Moscow winter night.

"Live, our friends and successors, succeed in your daring plans, mould and create!"

The New Year "Manifesto" was printed on thick paper and, after being signed by all those who greeted 1960 in the Central Art Workers' Club, packed in a special metal urn. Attached to the text of the Address to Our Successors was a tape recording of the Kremlin chimes and Valeria Barsova's New Year toast addressed to actors, musicians and painters bidding farewell to the 20th century, a century of struggle between good and evil, a century of world wars of unprecedented scale and horror, a century of great revolutionary accomplishments, a century of the liberation of peoples from colonial slavery.

REQUEST TO READERS

Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

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